WORDS ON PEACE AND TOLERANCE

Professor Ahmad At-Tayyeb,
Grand Imam of Al-Azhar

(1)

Translated by

Dr. Muḩammad Fawzy AbdelHay

Dr. Ibrahim Muḩammad Al-Gazzar

Mr. Ibrahim Attiya Juma'a

Mr. Abdullah Al-Sayed Ragab

Revised by

Dr. Ahmad Awad Elezabi



(اللغة الإنجليزية)

The original Arabic title of the Book is:

كلمات الإمام في التسامح والسلام

Its English title is:

Words on Peace and Tolerance

Published by Al-Azhar Center for Translation (ACT)

☎ (+2) 202 23868005
azharcenter4trans@gmail.com
Al-Azhar Conference Center (ACC) Building,
4 Ismail El-Qabbany St., off El-Tayaran St,
Nasr City, Cairo, Arab Republic of Egypt.

http://www.azhar.eg/act

The book cover design is a portrait of Al-Azhar Mosque by the French Artist Émile Prisse d'Avennes (1807-1879).
First edition, 1438 AH/2017CE
Registration No.:2017/17185
ISBN:

Contents

The Speech of H.E. the Grand Imam of AL-Azhar at the Conference of Dar Al-ʾIftāʾ

Al-Azhar Grand Imam's Speech at the International *Fatwa* Conference entitled, "Academic and *Fatwa* Qualification for the Preachers of Muslim Minority Mosques"

- I reject any human legislation that directly or indirectly contradicts the teachings of the Noble Qurʾān or the Prophet's Tradition (*Sunnah*).
- Lack of *Fatwa* development and legal reasoning has inflicted intense suffering and hardship on the public of the Muslim nation.
- Doing injustice and inflicting harm to one's wife on purpose is such a heinous crime.
- Marriage-related religious laws have been passed for the benefit of the family and the whole society.
- Homeless children are victims of families that slid into the chaos of divorce and marriage.
- Muslim scholars in the past century were more courageous than our contemporary scholars in terms of applying legal reasoning and renewal to religious rulings which are desperately needed by the people.
- If Muslim jurists abandon independent legal reasoning, they will leave a gap, which will be filled only by others.
- The term "Muslim minorities" is an alien term that did not exist in our Muslim culture. Therefore, Al-Azhar has always avoided using it in the documents and statements it issues.
- The term "Muslim minorities" implies feelings of isolation and inferiority.
- Our Muslim culture disapproves the term "Muslim minorities" and replaces it with "full citizenship."
- Jurisprudence of citizenship is invulnerable to the false evidence of our enemies and neocolonialism.
- Establishing jurisprudence of citizenship among European Muslims is a crucial step towards the achievement of "positive integration" that protects the Islamic identity.

- Neocolonialism uses the concept of "minorities" as a pretext for the division and fragmentation of countries.

The following speech was delivered by H.E. the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar, Professor Ahmad At-Tayyeb at the International *Fatwa* Conference entitled, "Academic and *Fatwa* Qualification for the Preachers of Muslim Minority Mosques"

In the Name of Allah, the Gracious, the Merciful

All praise be to Allah. May Allah's peace and blessings be upon Prophet Muḩammad and upon his family and Companions! Eminent scholars and respected *Muftis*,

Welcome to your second home; welcome to Egypt. Welcome to Al-Azhar institution. I hope this conference will meet some Muslim expectations and hopes in *Muftis* and *fatwa* institutions for bridging the widening gap between the needs of their present life, on the one hand, and what we may call ‘absurd jurisprudence’. By absurd jurisprudence, I mean the newly invented type of jurisprudence presented to Muslims day and night. It does not guide Muslims to mercy, ease, and simplicity of Islam, but it rather throws them into a plethora of traditional extremist opinions that were expressed under very special circumstances which no longer fit into their real life.

Unfortunately, such absurd jurisprudence has found groups of individual *Muftis* who managed to outdo many official *fatwa* institutions in our Arab world, and even all jurisprudence academies, particularly Al-Azhar Al-Sharif's Islamic Research Academy.

The success of that absurd approach to jurisprudence was not due to its rationality, ease, or ability to make people's lives better. It has achieved success and drawn attention because of the advocates' ability to interact with people in the remote areas and far reaching villages. Moreover, its advocates have used mosques as perfect platforms to talk to people and give desirable responses to their requests. In the meanwhile, the *fatwas* issued by *Dar al-’Iftā*’, Islamic academies, and *fiqh* committees have acquired an individual nature and remained restricted to purely academic volumes that are of no benefit to millions of Muslims, or to academic forums where we, scholars, talk to each other and give a list of recommendations at the closing sessions. However, such recommendations often miss their way to the sincere people who would apply them to people's real life.

Dear honorable Sheikhs,

Please excuse my frankness in addressing this crucial topic and do not think I am criticizing or condemning you. Allah forbids! I even cannot imagine myself acting in this manner because I am certain that I am addressing an elite group of great scholars and formidable thinkers from our Arab and Muslim world. I am the first of you to shoulder this great responsibility before Allah the Almighty and the Muslims. Perhaps, I have been more in touch with such miserable people and have been aware of the problems and sufferings that may have caused them to be homeless and destroyed. All this is due to a lack of *fatwa* development as well as to scholars' fear to employ legal reasoning. I thought that we, as people of knowledge and *fatwa*, could fully comprehend the religious texts we use for issuing *fatwas*, but we may not know how to apply the rulings of these texts to our daily life. Likewise, we may not ponder over the impact of these rulings and the amount of social and psychological sufferings they might cause to the ordinary people.

Here is an example of a real-life problem related to the chaos of practicing polygamy and divorce in our society and the amount of suffering a wife may encounter as a result of this phenomenon, not to mention the destruction of families and homelessness of children who often become disobedient and criminal.

I stress, here, that I am not calling for legislations that annul men's right to polygamy; I totally reject any human legislation that directly or indirectly contradicts the teachings of the Noble Qur'ān or the Prophet's Tradition of *Sunnah*. However, I want to block the way for those who would misinterpret my words and decontextualize them in order to make some personal gains. I wonder what makes a poor Muslim man, for example, marry a second wife and abandon his first one, along with her children, leaving them vulnerable to suffer poverty and family fragmentation! Did not such a man feel any remorse at misusing this religious right and taking it far away from its objectives?

In my opinion, the answer to the above-mentioned question is that the teachings of Islam concerning this issue have never

reached such people. Moreover, there have been too many *fatwas* on the conditioned practice of polygamy but a few *fatwas* on the condition itself, namely doing justice and causing no harm to the first wife. It is well known in jurisprudence that the absence of the condition entails the absence of the conditioned and not vice versa. However, many ordinary people misunderstood this Islamic ruling and thought that polygamy was made lawful without any conditions or responsibilities that might hinder fulfilling their wishes and sexual desires, as long as they are fulfilled through 'lawful' means!

The rulings of the Islamic *Sharia,* which we have been taught and still learn from the books of Muslim jurisprudence, especially in the chapters on marriage, sate clearly that marriage has five rulings under certain circumstances. Accordingly, marriage could be discouraged or even prohibited under certain conditions. Jurists of the *Ḥanafi* School of jurisprudence hold the view that marriage is prohibited if the husband knows certainly that he would wrong his wife. Thus, the wisdom behind marriage is to achieve certain goals, such as protecting oneself from sins and gaining reward from Allah for giving birth to good children who worship Allah. However, if one's marriage would result in injustice or causing harm to others, the husband is considered sinful in accordance with the Islamic principle stating that, “warding off evils takes precedence over bringing benefits”.

Despite the fact that there is generally jurist consensus that marriage is obligatory in case one fears lest he shall fall in *zina* (illicit sexual intercourse), the jurists conditioned it by the avoidance of malfeasance. The *Ḥanafi* jurists even state that when a conflict occurs between one’s fears to fall in illicit sexual relations if s/he does not marry or fears that s/he may act unjustly towards his spouse, the latter prevails over the former and, thus, marriage becomes forbidden. They argue that, “injustice is a violation of people’s rights while the sin of illicit sexual intercourse violates a right of Allah. The rights of people take precedence over that of Allah in the cases of conflict, because people are always in need of help whereas Allah, the All-

Sufficient, is never of any need.” The same view finds further echoes in the legal understandings of *Maliki* and *Shafi‘i* jurists. Here is a lesson to learn: acting unjustly to one’s spouse is a crime worse in effect than the crime of *zina*. As such, the crime of *zina* is, by analogy, a minor sin compared to injustice towards women, the latter being a major sin.

Evidently, this is the case when a man has only one wife; how about the second or third marriage accompanied with fears of committing injustice or with the firm intent to hurt the first wife by the practice of polygamy? One may argue that a wife may ask for divorce in the case of harm and if the husband uses his authority to refrain from divorce arbitrarily, she may sue him and ask for *khul‘* (i.e., legal separation in return for a refund of the marital gift that the husband had given to her). As such, let a husband remarry as he likes but let a wife either accept it or take recourse to *khul‘*.

In response, this argument would harm the wife in two forms: first, she would suffer separation; and second, she would have to sacrifice all of her rights in the case of *khul‘*. Meanwhile, the husband then has two benefits: first, he would then achieve his desires against the laws of Sharia that instruct a restrain of them; and second, he would also gain back all that he had paid to the wife who, under injustice, would have to give up her own rights.

It is for this reason that we find no evidence, explicit or implicit, in the juristic discourse on this issue, allowing marriage when fears of injustice are most likely to occur, even after giving the aforementioned options to the wife: to accept polygamy or resort to *khul‘*. Jurists’ expressions, therefore, assert the moral responsibility a marital partner has to bear toward a spouse. Evidently, the rule they regard in this context relies on the rights that the marital institution entails, rather than being a means to satisfy one’s accidental whims and desires. Surely, marriage is a major responsibility that the Qur’ān calls it a “firm covenant”: “How can you take it back (women’s dowry) when you have intimate access to each other and they have taken a **firm covenant** from you” (Qur’ān, 4:21). Marriage is not meant to harm one’s spouse. Apparently, the laws of marriage only intend to achieve

benefits for all family members in all communities. Statistics on homeless children prove that no less than 90% of them are victims of miser marriages and tragic divorces. Furthermore, all the moral and social crimes that they commit originate from the arbitrary use of legal rights or misunderstanding of legal facts, a case which results in a wide gap between the legal understanding of texts and the proper perception of realities.

As witnessed in several real experiences, I think that the reason for that is the barrier of fear that precludes the scholars and jurists, in charge of *fatwa*, from the practice of *ijtihād* and legal reasoning regarding the legal rulings and the evidence in their support, following the proper perception of the issue in question with due evaluation of the anticipated benefits and evils.

It is painful to say that our scholars and *muftis* of the past century proved more courageous than today's scholars do. At their time, they bravely explored issues and cases of urgent need of people from new perspectives applied in legal reasoning and judgment. For example, their *ijtihād*-based conclusion that the tripartite divorce declared in the same session is only regarded as one divorce. However, a counterview still enjoys a very wide agreement among the earlier scholars. For example, Judge Abdel-Wahāb al-Māliki deemed it a heretical view while Ibn 'Abdel-Barr said, "It is not an opinion of the people of knowledge." However, Al-Azhar scholars found no qualm at that time to discuss this case and issued an official *fatwa* contradicting the dominant schools of law on this issue. They also sought for evidence to support their *fatwa* from the traditional jurisprudence or *fiqh*. Eventually, they concluded that this formula counts as only one divorce in practice.

This *ijtihād*-based case took place in 1929, which was later adopted as a law in the Marital Status Laws. More to the point, *Dar al-'Iftā'* (the Egyptian House of *Fatwa*) approved this *fatwa* approximately ninety years ago. Unfortunately, *Dar al-'Iftā'*, along with the Islamic Research Academy are vacillating in fear and hold back from exploring more serious issues in the area of family laws than the tripartite divorce. The barrier of fear, which

we have mentioned, thwarts their endeavors and discourages them. The issue of *ijtihād* continues to be a closed zone in the face of those concerned with the pains of Muslims, a case which has led, or is about to lead, Sharia to withdraw from the life realities of people and societies and thus restricts it to the circles of research and study.

Some smart contemporaries observed this phenomenon and declared that if jurists' abstention from *Ijtihād* will eventually leave the Muslim communities prey to the willful influence of "the Other", it becomes a kind of separating religion from life or separating life from religion, the case which is denounced as a slogan but practiced in reality.

Dear Respected Scholars,

It is necessary to acknowledge that we experience a real crisis, the price of which all Muslims have to pay everywhere, as a result of fear and discouragement in dealing with the Sharia, which we depict as eternally compatible and effective, regardless of time and location. We have to present proper responses to all new cases and urgent incidents. This crisis also rises from the absence of the *Maqaṣid*-oriented vision (a vision based on the "Supreme Objectives of Sharia"), a case which inevitably confuses the *ijtihād*-oriented vision driving jurists away from seeking the proper legal solution to the cases in question. Moreover, there are also the ready-made and imported cross-national *fatwas, which* pay no attention to the circumstances of local communities, in total disregard of the variant customs, habits, cultures, languages and races.

Consequently, the same *fatwa* (legal response from a *mufti*) is given to all Muslims everywhere regardless of their countries, customs, and conditions of peace or war, richness or poverty, education or illiteracy. Is there any logic in that? Is it acceptable that all Muslims receive the same *fatwa* in Cairo, Niamey, Mogadishu, Jakarta, New Delhi, Moscow, Paris, and other capitals of the world in the east and the west when the legal cases might be

similar in form but different in realities, possibilities of harmful effects and compelling benefits?

In respect with the topic of the conference, I seek the permission of my brother H.E. the Grand Mufti of Egypt to present my remark regarding the term of “Muslim minorities” used in the title of the conference. It is an imported term, alien to our Muslim culture. As such, Al-Azhar would avoid using it in speeches, documents and statements. Actually, it implies the seeds of seclusion and inferiority. It also paves the way for the seeds of sedition, disunity and disintegration. It denies the minorities many of their religious and civil rights. As far as I know, the Muslim culture never knew this term. Rather, it denies and denounces using it. Instead of this term, it uses “full citizenship” as affirmed in the Charter of Medina. Indeed, the Islamic citizenship is all about rights and duties that everyone equally enjoys in conformity with the basic standards and criteria, which ensure the achievement of justice and equality: “Surely, Allah enjoins justice and kindness.” (Qurʾān, 16:90) [The Prophet also says], “They [the Jews] are entitled to receive rights equal to ours and to do duties equal to ours.” As such, the Muslim citizen of Britain is a full British citizen, entitled to have equal rights and duties. Likewise, the Christian Egyptian citizen is a full citizen, who has rights and duties equal to that of all other citizens. In no way can we describe this full citizenship as belonging to a minority, a term implying bias and disparity in disagreement with the citizenship.

I think that promoting the proper legal understanding of citizenship among the European Muslims and other multi-cultural communities, rich with diverse identities, is a very indispensable step on the way of 'positive integration,' for which we have called in numerous European capitals. Actually, this guarantees national security and solidarity and strengthens national affiliation, as a basis for the social unity. This concept enhances the acceptance of cultural diversity and peaceful coexistence and eliminates the bitter feelings of alienation, which confuses the national unity. As such, migrants suffer a painful conflict between their love of their birth homeland whose graces they have enjoyed and their love to a

deluded home to which they seek refuge to, on the other, as well as a painful feeling of being a member of a menaced minority.

If we promote the *fiqh* of citizenship, instilling it deeper in Muslim minds and cultures, it will act as a strong barrier against the colonial claims, which have frequently employed minorities in political conflicts to achieve their schemes for hegemony, expansion, and dominance. They maliciously used the minorities issue as their preferred means for national division and partition, the case which signifies the two basic mechanisms of the new colonization.

Preparing preachers for the mission of *'iftā'* is a highly important issue. We deeply appreciate the attention and care that *Dar al-'Iftā'* (the Egyptian House of *Fatwa*) gives to this issue. Actually, much may be said about this urgent obligation. Al-Azhar has also contributed to the formation of the preachers delegated overseas to have the necessary awareness of all issues of urgent need to Muslims living there in various fields. 538 preachers have attended the courses held by the World Association for Al-Azhar Graduates in Cairo. They came from different regions and countries including Afghanistan, Pakistan, Kurdistan of Iraq, China, Indonesia, Britain and Yemen as well as African and Latin American States. In this regard, I hope there would be a kind of coordination with the World Association for Al-Azhar Graduates to build on the available expertise instead of beginning from scratch.

Dear brothers, I have expatiated my discussion, so I beg your kind pardon. Thank you very much for listening to me.

As-Salamu ʽAlaykum wa Raḩmatu Allāh wa Barakatuh[1]

[1] This formula of greeting is the religious greeting commonly used by Muslims. It means 'Allah's Peace, Mercy, and Blessings be upon you (all)!'

The Speech of H.E. the Grand Imam of Aم-Azhar at the opening of the Fourth Round of the Dialogue between Elders from the East and the West in Abu Dhabi

In the Name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful

Rt. Revd. Justin Welbey, the Archbishop of Canterbury
Elders of the East and the West

Ladies and Gentlemen
As-Salamu ʿAlaykum wa Raḥmatu Allāh wa Barakatuh

This is the first meeting we hold in the Arab East, in the United Arab Emirates. Thanks to the rightly-guided leadership and wise leaders of this country, it has become a model for the balanced openness and well-planned development in which originality and creativeness, heritage, and modernity come together in fine harmony and unique compatibility, rarely found in countries initiating their way on the route of progress and development.

This is the first time, in the Arab modern history, that a finely planned meeting takes place between the Muslim Elders and the Christian Elders from the Anglican Communion for specific objectives. Praying to Allah for success and help, we pin huge expectations on today's meeting to initiate a seriously new step on the way to build a world of integration and mutual understanding. In essence, this initiative aims to relieve the current human sufferings of terror, pains, bloodshed and wars.

Wise Elders,

I think you agree with me that most of the current human tragedies have germinated from the dominant materialism and injustice of anti-religious policies that go against, and even mock, the revealed religious teachings. However, they have manifestly failed to provide alternatives of religions to achieve a kind of happiness to humankind, create hopes for better and meaningful life, or guarantee rights equal to those guaranteed by the revealed religions, especially the rights of justice and equality as well as the right of freedom and the right to be different.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I have no doubt that humanity, at this moment, is eagerly yearning for a return to the revealed religions and their human and ethical teachings. This has been the case after so long and painful experiences, misleading humanity to imminent destruction and certain loss; these experiences abusively dominated the destinies of peoples and their rights and resources. Immersed in their powers and arrogance, such experiences manifested the imperial philosophy of expansion and fell prey to the monstrous desire for hegemony and unlimited lust of unilateralism and egoism.

During the past two centuries, some people mistakenly thought that the scientific progress and technical and philosophical advancement had eliminated the role of religions and turned them into antiquities only to be on display in the museum of history. Moreover, they thought that the advancement achieved in these areas is the one worthy of leading humankind, taking charge of refining and developing human feelings, and deterring any of the evil tendencies.

To their surprise, the reality falsified that new dream day by day. Indeed, the reality left the delusions of this dream exposed, facing their fate. We read in many books that if the 19th century was a time for scholarly research and philosophies of evolution, it was also a century for the colonial expansion and bad utilization of knowledge that aimed to achieve the imperial interests and the political ambitions of the colonizers.

Unlike what is stated in the heavenly sacred religions, some of the 19th century scholars and thinkers went far to claim that human races are not originated from the same origin, but came from various origins, seeking early roots in the great apes and other animals. They went on with their claims to build other theories on these false assumptions, which disunited humankind and categorized peoples on the basis of their color and race. Another theory appeared to give rise to the superiority of the Aryan race over other races, depicted as the designer of all scientific, cultural, and civilizational discoveries.

Surely, you know about the history of these pseudo-scholarly theories, which was wickedly devised to justify the imperial policies and the domination of other nations in open disrespect of the unanimously agreed-upon teachings of religion in the issue of human creation as independent species. Based on the sacred texts, the issue of human creation will continue, irrespective of the scientific development and advancement, as an eschatological metaphysical issue, entirely beyond the limits of science, experimentation, and laboratories.

"I did not make them witness the creation of the heavens and the earth, nor the creation of themselves. Nor would I take the misleaders as helpers." (Qurʾān, 18: 51) The 20th century was not better than the 19th century. Two World Wars took place leaving behind more than seventy millions dead. Evidently, the religion has no relation whatsoever to any of these. Only the false inclinations to the European superiority of race were among the causes that triggered them. In the wake of these two wars, nuclear weapons soon appeared, as a new leap for world terror and a constant threat to humanity.

Then 21st century then began with a new imperial policy with excessive inclination to violence and cruelty, which has of course led to much affliction in the west. However, we—the Arabs and Muslims—are experiencing it in the east as a living reality turning life into a medley of dust, bloodshed, tears and ruins. The new imperial colonization also found those who philosophize and theorize these policies and present justification thereto, such as the theory of “clash of civilization”, “end of history”, “constructive chaos” and “center-margin” theory.

To sum up, the amazing scientific advancement has unfortunately no parallel advancement in ethics. Likewise, the technical development, especially in the area of lethal weapons, proved devoid of all values expected to direct it to the right destination for human welfare. Noticeably, wars are constantly increasing and growing worse day by day in synchrony with the progress of knowledge on the ladder of development. Indeed, the scientific progress and war breakup are currently concomitant,

each strengthening and inflaming the other. The same is true for the development and progress achieved in the areas of philosophy, literature, sociology, and arts. They all advanced apart from the philosophy of religion and in the absence of ethics, in total contempt of mere rational contemplations and metaphysics, all in isolation from the human heritage and its religious and philosophical treasures. Eventually, these modern theories proved more detrimental than beneficial.

Dear Brothers,

History repeats itself and the conference we are now holding is very similar to the International Conference on Religion held in London in 1936, to which the then Grand Sheikh of Al-Azhar Muḥammad Muṣtafa Al-Maraghi sent a treatise entitled, "Human Brotherhood and Universal Colleagueship." I was amazed to identify, first of all, this kind of similarity in worries experienced by Europe at that time and those we suffer at this very moment of our history. Second: the titles of treatises of the far past are very similar to those of today. The treatise of Sheikh Al-Maraghi had a mission. He was pursuing and exploring the issues of human fraternity and international peace, which are identical with the contents of today's mission in pursuit of a world of integration and mutual understanding. It is most likely that the conclusion of Al-Azhar treatise in London Conference will rightfully guide our way in the conclusion of the current meeting of Abu Dhabi.

The significance of this message lies in the fact that Western citizens had then developed a pessimistic view of the clergymen. At that time, a message was declared at the heart of Europe that the world could only escape its contemporary crises through devoutness and through holding firm to religion, maintaining that the cause of civilizational decline in the age of scientific prosperity was not religion, as mistakenly perceived by common people, but rather it was atheism and materialist philosophies. Few people thought that the leaders and reformers could dare to propagate such a critical approach. At that time, it was quite onerous to point profound criticism to the morality of science at the peak of its

prosperity. Besides, it was not easy to criticize positive philosophies or to warn people against their lure and dominance over social and political theories, and even over religious thought itself. Hence, some Christian and Muslim scholars were compelled to resort to a conciliatory or adaptive approach between sacred texts and opposing scholarly and philosophical perspectives, even if such perspectives were grounded on sheer potentiality, not attaining the acceptable level of scientific laws or gaining certitude. This adaptive approach was frequently adopted at the expense of clear denotations of sacred texts, so that many people felt that religion was about to suffer an eventual decline.

Then, the late Grand Sheikh Al-Maraghi did not hesitate to state in his message that the only cure for such decline is "devoutness and religious sentiment", which he described as an intuitive element instilled in the human being. It is more forceful in driving humanity towards peace, justice, and equality than atheist inclinations that nourish corruption in the human community. The late Grand Sheikh also expects that atheists and their fellows who satirize religions may raise the objection that history abounds with human-made catastrophes and disasters that were motivated by "a religious sentiment that acted as a reckless force prompting horrific violence and destruction." These distressing occurrences, Al-Maraghi believed, constituted a tragic reality, though religion had nothing to do with it. Indeed, none of the divine faiths incite the calamities imputed to it, and the genuine motive behind these calamities has been the manipulation of religion sentiment in producing a distorted reality and attaining goals that are justly denounced by religions themselves. After all, it is only misguided religious scholars, rather than religion itself, who stand behind such tragic occurrences!

Here, fellow brothers and sisters, springs the serious responsibility resting directly on our shoulders or those of devout religious scholars and preachers to face the crises that distressingly loom large in today's world. Scholarly fellowship, which has once been proposed by Al-Azhar in the thirties of the last century, begins with a fellowship among religious scholars, or in the words

of leading theologian Hans Kung, “No peace among the nations without peace among the religions”. Therefore, religious scholars—even when they intend to undertake their role in preaching world peace, sustaining harmony in the face of struggle, and realizing people’s hopes for an integrated world with full faith in mutual understanding—should first maintain peace and understanding amongst themselves. In this way, they can then preach it to others. Such is the framework of action that Al-Azhar has always maintained since it initiated the first practical step in this long path with an official visit to your venerated church Canterbury Cathedral. We were so pleased, Reverend Archbishop, with your generous entertainment of Al-Azhar delegation in your palace during the period of June 6 to June 9, 2016 A.C. Then the second step towards the Vatican City to Pope Francis followed on May 23, 2016 A. C. The third visit was to the World Council of Churches (WCC) in Geneva, during the period of September 28 to October 2, 2016 A.C. By Allah’s Willing, I expect such visits to largely contribute in mitigating the pains of the poor, the wretched and those groaning under the fire of absurd wars and the deviant policies of those lacking religious and moral conscience.

Here we gather today in Abu Dhabi, in a meeting of wisdom and fellow feeling, invoking support from our Almighty Lord, and imitating the noble example of Prophets and Messengers in their sincere reliance on the Lord alone and in their bearing unimaginable burdens for the sake of delivering the human community from aberration and guiding it to the path of happiness in this life and in the life to come.

Dear noble guests,

I have a hope in this meeting that we forget the past and its nurtured grudges and enmities, and that we look forward to the future, having firm belief that we will not be held accountable for the past before our Lord. Rather, we will definitely have to account for that which happens at the present time in which we live, in terms of our duties towards the Lord and His creation.

Finally, dear guests, the great religion of Islam which I embrace as a faith, openly welcomes any efforts that do not only channel the welfare of humankind, but also care for other creature, including animals and plants, and even inanimate objects.

Thank you for your kind attention!
As-Salamu ʿAlaykum wa Raḥmatu Allāh wa Barakatuh

Written at Al-Azhar Sheikhdom,
on Al-Muharram 28, 1438 AH/October 30, 2016 A. C.
Professor Ahmad At-Tayyeb
The Grand Imam of Al-Azhar

The Speech of H.E. the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar in the Celebration of the Birthday of Prophet Muḩammad
(Allah's Peace and Blessing be upon him)

In the Name of Allah, the Merciful, the Merciful

All praise is due to Allah, and peace and blessings be upon Muḩammad ibn ʿAbdullah, whose birthday is being celebrated, upon his family and upon his companions.

Mr. Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi, President of the Arab Republic of Egypt, may Allah safeguard you, and the honorable audience,

As-Salamu ʿAlaykum wa Raḩmatu Allāh wa Barakatuh

The Prophet's birthday is not only a celebration of a great Messenger, through whom Allah has guided humanity and redressed the course of history; it is rather a celebration of the birth of a nation raised by this noble Prophet (pbuh) to observe virtues and noble manners, to call for the good and the right, and to encounter evil and falsehood. By dent of these Prophetic teachings, the Muslims introduced through their civilizational journey all that brought happiness to humanity, broadly provided it with a spacious umbrella of justice, freedom, and equality, and safeguarded it against the pitfalls of other civilizations which incurred vicious evils on humanity in the past and the present.

Perhaps it is quite unattainable, if not impossible, to offer a fully encompassing overview about the personality of Muḩammad (pbuh)or to incorporate all the aspects of its greatness within a single speech, lecture or book. As a proof of this fact, Muḩammad ibn Yusuf Aṣ-Ṣāliḩi, the Levantine, a 10th Hijri century scholar, noted in the introduction to his major encyclopedia entitled, *Subul al-Huda wa r-Rashād* (Ways to Guidance and Uprightness):

"Contemplating this book [referring to his own encyclopedia], you would know that it constitutes the gist of my worldly life and my provision in my life to come." He adds that he selected it from among more than three hundred Prophetic biographies,

which he had thoroughly reviewed; and he included in it only that which is true.[2]

You might also be surprised to know that the number of the pages of this six-volume book added up to nine thousand pages, all dedicated to the biography of the Prophet (pbuh). It is interesting that the biography of the noble Prophet (pbuh) was addressed from several perspectives, which is something unparalleled in addressing the biographies of other Prophets (pbuh). These perspectives include the Prophet Muḩammad’s characteristics, attributes, manners, and virtues, all depicting him as a unique human being over history. Therefore, *Ash-Shamā’il Al-Muḩammadiyyah* (The Muḩammadan Attributes] is now an independent discipline addressing the Prophet’s biography, and registering his most detailed physical and moral characteristics, as well as his personal and societal affairs. These attributes also include his features, the color of his eyes, the shape of his mouth, nose, and hair, the breadth of his shoulders, the shape of his palms, feet and gait, and how he looked at people. The description even involves a detailed registration of his ring, clothing, sword and shield, his turban and garments, and how he is dressed, how he eats, drinks, laughs, jests, etc.

As for his moral characteristics, authors included forbearance, mettle, patience, clemency, compassion, leniency, generosity, bravery, bashfulness, faithfulness, honesty, fairness, chivalry and magnanimity.

Such passion to register the details of the noble Prophet’s life was not limited to old historians and biographers, but rather extended to include historians and biographers at every age and place, almost ending – as far as we know - with Dr. Salahuddin Al-Munajjid (d. 2010), who authored *The Encyclopedia of Writings about the Prophet* (Allah's Peace and Blessing be upon him), in which he enumerated two thousand four hundred and eighty-eight books dedicated to the study of the Prophet’s biography in all its aspects.

---

2 Aṣ-Ṣāliḩi, *Subul al-Huda wa r-Rashād,* Vol. 1, p. 6.

Despite this multitude of Muslim and non-Muslim historians who dedicated their lives to the registry of the Prophet’s biography and to unveiling its details, still much of this prophetic biography is unaddressed. Indeed, humanity is now in dire need for such ideal biography to guide them across the intricacies and thorny paths of the present age. Besides, all that has been written about the Prophet (Allah's Peace and Blessing be upon him) is but a token of reverence and appreciation of his unfathomable nobility and greatness.

In the present age, the radicalness of contemporary political movements and social ideologies imported from abroad are engaging our young generations by feigning that they promote equality and non-discrimination. It has, therefore, become necessary to remind those generations of the example of the Prophet (Allah's Peace and Blessing be upon him) and the leading Muslim scholars, who remain unacknowledged only by the ungrateful. The young generations also need to know that innovation does not necessarily mean total dismissal or denouncement of tradition, and that arrogance and recklessness constitute a plague that inevitably ends up disturbing values, concealing the truth and distorting consciousness.

In his introduction to his book *ʿAbqariyyatu Muḩammad* [The Genius of Muḩammad]”, ‘Abbas Maḩmoud Al-‘Aqqād rightly observes that a person who fails to perceive the greatness of the noble people is actually valueless. He also notes that the society in which the rights of the illustrious dignitaries are disregarded is naturally more disregarding of the rights of the lower ones. “What value can a person possibly gain when s/he fails to perceive the value of the great notables? Really, when people disregard the makers of glory, those lower than them are most likely disregarded.”[3] Likewise, in his laudatory poem celebrating the glories of Al-Azhar, ʿAḩmad Shawqi—the Prince of Arab Poets, hails Al-Azhar for safeguarding the Muslim heritage, the splendid

[3] Al-‘Aqqād, *‘Abqariyyaut Muḩammad*, 2:24.

heritage shared by the entire humanity whose rich treasures continue to inspire great minds from the east and the west until today. Then he goes on to forewarn us against the “delusive band”, which denies the past insomuch that they could deny their own forefathers and ancestors just because they belong to the past. This delusive band is fond of destroying the tradition though they still have nothing new to introduce. They introduce nothing novel but emptiness, shallowness and valueless gossip. Shawqi said,

Follow not the delusive band, denying the past
Were they to disclaim their dead forebears in dust,
They would have done it in fact
Preoccupied by diminishing the past
Yet, when building, they fall short!
Weak in skills and poor in knowledge, but have big mouth!

Honorable Ladies and Gentlemen,

Celebrating the birthday of Prophet Muḩammad (Allah's Peace and Blessing be upon him) is actually an act of honoring human greatness represented in one of its highest and noblest exemplary figures. He was great in birth, great in life, great in polity and administration, great in speech and rhetoric, and great in presidency and leadership. He proved his historic greatness even in all social roles as a father, a husband, a master and a man. It is but very little to write about him, as well as about other great human examples, lengthy voluminous books celebrating their histories and biographies. They are deservedly worth of celebrating their births and of dedicating long times for reflections and writings about them. Here, I feel it necessary to announce my advice to all common Muslims and leaders as well. Unfortunately, the Prophet (pbuh) who “had an irresistible inward impulse to announce the truth, for which he risked his life and suffered daily persecution for years” is no longer today's ideal for the Muslim life and the Muslim main battles against poverty, ignorance, diseases and scientific and cultural decline. The Muslims got nothing from turning away from the guidance of the Prophet Muḩammad (pbuh) but bitter fruits and unbearable humility. His birthday has

hopefully been expected to invigorate goodness in the hearts of Muslims being—to use the Qurʾānic term, the most charitable nation: "You have been the most charitable nation brought out to humankind". (Qurʾān, 3:110)

Surely, Muslims are undertaking a variety of major battles aiming for scientific and technological progress and civilization after years of heteronomy to other civilizations with greater powers and scientific progress. It is most significant for Muslims, undertaking these battles, to reflect on the birth of the Prophet (Allah's Peace and Blessing be upon him) as a maker of civilization, and to adopt his ideas for renaissance and his determinate heart and challenging patience in face of crises. Indeed, he left us an enormous legacy of matchless teachings and guidelines in his statements, practices, decisions, and behavior. Muslims are expected to avail themselves of this precious treasure on ethics and beliefs in their current battles against inability, backwardness, subordination and humility. Conversely, reflecting on the Prophet's heritage and the *status quo* of Muslims could move a careful researcher to suffer encephalic vertigo. Muslims are hugely graced with sources of powers and means for urbanity and progress whereas their realities have been modestly humble for long times until humility has become a Muslim main feature and characteristic.

We—Allah knows— never intend to impart disappointment or cry for the past glories, but the current reality is too difficult to ignore or overlook. Thank Allah, I am limitlessly full of hopes and trust in the Muslim Nation. Despite sickness and weakness, the nation will never die or melt into other nations. Rather, it will bear the flame of truth and freedom and remain the most charitable nation as the Qurʾān describes it.

Hopes are first placed in Allah, then in young people whose eyes reflect delightful news and vivid anticipations backed with resolute determination to save this nation from idleness and decline. They are the vigorous builders of civilization, progress, and advancement inspired by the infallible revelation and the guidance of Prophet Muḩammad—Allah's Peace and Blessing be

upon him and upon all other Prophets and upon their families and companions.

Mr. President,

I deeply appreciate your due care for Egypt's youth and advise myself, first of all, as well as all executive officials to pay their utmost attention for the youth, being the real treasure of Egypt and the originators of its renaissance. Egypt, our dear country, is really laden with worries and pains but also fraught with hopes and trust in Allah.

At last, I would like to congratulate you and the Egyptians as well as all the Arabs and the Muslims on the commemoration of the honorable Prophet, beseeching Allah to help you achieve the best for people and land in our beloved nation. Thank you for listening.

As-Salamu ʽAlaykum wa Raḩmatu Allāh wa Barakatuh

Prof. Aḩmad At-Tayyeb
The Grand Imam of Al-Azhar
Rabīʻ ul-ʼAwwal 9, 1438 AH/Dec.8, 2016

The Speech of H.E. the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar in Cairo University

In the Name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful

All Praise is due to Allah. May Allah's Peace and Blessings be upon Prophet Muḩammad and upon His Family and Companions!

Professor Gaber Naṣṣār—President of Cairo University,

Dear presidents, professors, scholars, and personnel of Egyptian universities,

Dear female and male students of Cairo University and other universities,

As-Salamu ʽAlaykum wa Raḩmatu Allāhi wa Barakatuh

I am deeply happy to accept your invitation to deliver this lecture at Cairo University, a remarkable university that has graduated many notable Egyptian leading figures in science, literature, and culture. The famous *alumni* of Cairo University have been carrying the torches of enlightenment and knowledge over long decades in the horizons of Egypt and the Arab and Muslim worlds. It is also my pleasure to thank all university staff, vice presidents, deans, teaching staff, students, and personnel.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I find no word to express my happiness for delivering my message to my dear female and male students. Really, the message lectured now is just a repetition of what the professors already know. I frankly tell you that thinking about a suitable topic for addressing the Egyptian university youth in my endeavors to touch upon their concerns, worries, and dreams—has opened horizons teemed with tens of various issues that have come to my mind.

It is really beyond the rhetorical skills of any speaker, given the talent of charming eloquence and precision that one may display, to explore them all comprehensively and perfectly in one lecture. Youth and nation, youth and responsibility, rights due to young generations on old generations and the State, youth and science, youth and work, youth and faith, youth and atheism,

youth and ethics, youth and apathy, are some suggestions among numerous others that seemed optimal options.

Though highly important, it goes beyond the scope of this short message to mention, or to discuss, them all in a clear-cut and transparently open manner with deeply rooted and honest heritage-based theoretical framework. Such a framework must be associated with realities' synchronic problems, coinciding necessities and Egypt's ongoing crises and challenges.

Facing this multi-choice question with a medley of discrepant topics, I held it more appropriate to address you—youth, about some general rules and well-established principles. Your strong wills, promising prospects, constructive ideas, personal rich experiences and other creative abilities, as expected and even wished for, would help you assimilate and translate them into realities. Before presenting the general framework chosen for tonight's speech, I would like to remind you, youth, that you should not overlook your legacy of civilizations, for which you are markedly distinguished among the world youth. Never be heedless of your noble heritage and lofty roots profoundly entrenched over the course of time. Do not forget that your ancient civilization is really historic and majestic. You are the offspring of that civilization and shall be the makers of civilization. You are the youth of Egypt. You have exceptionally numerous imposing ancient civilizations intensely affecting your hearts and souls from the civilization of Ancient Egypt and Coptic civilization until the Arab and Muslim Civilization in Egypt. I think no other young generation in the world has this rich diversity of civilizations blessed with such valuable heritage expanding throughout long eras of history.

You may argue that all the youth around the world have their history and ancient civilizations. Yes, you would then tell the truth, but there are two distinctive differences worthy of your attention: **First**, all the world civilizations came next to that of Ancient Egypt, since the Egyptian civilization is the oldest of all. Yesterday, the head of the Chinese churches visited my office. When I asked him which civilization is more ancient: the

civilization of Ancient Egypt or that of China? He unhesitatingly said that the civilization of Ancient Egypt is older. However, it did not make me proud—as an Egyptian, to hear that answer. I felt discontent in heart while comparing the today's Chinese civilization to our older and greater one! Had affairs been rightly set, we would have been much better.

Second, the youth of other civilizations have no connection whatsoever with their heritage. They are alienated from and heedless of their ancient heritage and treasures. How could they build bridges to their heritage while they neither know nor speak its language? Nor do they even have the desire to discover the treasures of that heritage in the areas of knowledge, religion, behavior and ethics. This intentional separation between heritage and modernity has created new generations deeply attached to the diachronic changes of times and locations more than their association with old philosophies of theoretical principles and practical patterns. Such generations had nothing kept in mind about the mediaeval centuries and their rich treasures of science and knowledge. In a word, all the remnants of that era hold no position in their imagination or memory. It is truly fair for humankind to feel grateful for and recognize the favor of the Western modern civilization in terms of knowledge, philosophy and scientific inventions. They have contributed enormously to the liberation of humankind from the chains of tyrannies, suppression, transgression and corruption. Indeed, their achievements in these areas surpassed all other aspects of progress achieved since the dawn of history until the Renaissance era. It is equally fair to assert this fact by saying that these aspects have also created a parallel crisis, a chaotic or vague vision of the people of the modern time. I am not interested in exploring this crisis in length. It is enough to turn around to see the impending dangers threatening the entire world. In conclusion, I want to affirm the introductory part of my speech that you—the youth, have firm connections with your original civilizations guided and inspired by a splendid heritage in their corrective contributions to humanity

and endeavors to redress the long course of humanity for prosperous and most beneficial ends.

Dear honorable audience!

The Muslim civilization is the most recent of the Eastern civilizations. Its effects are far-reaching, and vividly impressing our souls. Like an equilateral triangle, it also has three equal sides: the Divine revelation, revelation-led minds and ethics. The Divine revelation forms the pole of the Muslim civilization's system. Like a heart to body, it nourishes civilization with life and lends it powers to stand firm and to survive. The revelation here refers to the text of the Qurʾān and its explanatory texts of the Sunnah, which illustrate the Qurʾānic instructions, make laws, guide moral conduct, and convey values and ethics. We know that the text of the Qurʾān is uniquely and exceptionally endowed with the blessing of being kept both in books and hearts together, the case which has enabled the Muslim civilization to stand steadily resilient in all the battles of developments and to survive till today. Despite the decline it has experienced and the severe blows it has received both from inside and outside, it remains as vivid and vigorous as an undying fire even at times of retirement and decline. Had any other nation suffered the calamities that befell the Muslim civilization, it would have faded away and become a part of the past history centuries ago.

Next to revelation comes the mind in the most perfect and comprehensive sense of its meaning in its relation to science and knowledge. It forms the foundation upon which the texts of the Divine revelation of the Qurʾān and the Sunnah rely. The Qurʾān fully depends on the human mind when addressing humankind about the divine laws and regulations. The high esteem of the human mind in the Qurʾān is indisputably well-known and clearly beyond debates. Mathematically speaking, the mere recitation of the Qurʾān provides conclusive evidence for that fact. For example, the roots of "*ʿaql* (mind/reason/intellect)", "*fikr* (thinking), and "*naẓar*" (reasoning)," all indicating the intellectual process of building rational arguments and proofs, are repeated in more than 120 times in the Qurʾān in linguistic forms reflective of

the repetitive occurrences of those intellectual activities, such as "*ya'lamūn* (to know), "*ya'qilūn* (to perceive), "*yatadabbarūn* (to contemplate), "*yufakkirūn*" (to think), "*yanẕurūn*" (to watch), "*yasma'ūn*" (to hear), "*yafqahūn*" (to understand). The Qur'ān decisively differentiates between the degree of certainty resulting from scientific facts, which are full certitude, i.e. true, and the degree of conjecture, doubt or suspicion as expressed in Allah's saying, "They have no knowledge about this; they only follow conjecture. Conjecture is no substitute for the truth. You shall disregard those who turn away from our message and only desire this worldly life." (Qur'ān, 53:28-29)

As to the pillar of ethics in the Muslim civilization, it is enough to stress two points:

First, the ethics of Islam are invariably constant. They are not open for change and alteration in submission to the logic of interests and purposes or the logic of power and dominance or any other epistemological moral structure typically adored by other civilizations. Over their long history, the Muslims never plundered other nations or devised pretexts to murder, fight or dominate them. In a word, the immoral behavior in the view of the Islamic ethics is eternally abhorrent and immoral, whereas the moral behavior is everlastingly good and moral. When it comes to ethics, the Muslim ontological philosophy accepts no relativity. Against the Machiavellian cynical duplicity and disregard for morality as coined in the principle: "the end justifies the means," Islam never condones double-standard policies or accepts any immoral vice associated with despotic minds that have given rise to human contemporary crises, pains and distresses.

Second, the Islamic acts of worship, e.g. prayers and fasting—no matter how great and numerous—cannot substitute ethics. Unless the devotional acts of worship are grounded in moral principles, they will be ineffective. One day, the Prophet (pbuh) had a question about a certain woman who kept praying all night and fasting all day, but still verbally assaulted her neighbors. In response, the Prophet (pbuh) said, "There is no good in her. She is following the way of Hellfire." Again, they asked about another

woman, who only offered the prescribed prayers and gave nothing but bits of curd in charity, but she never hurts anyone. The Prophet (pbuh) said "She is one of the people of Paradise."[4] He (pbuh) also said, "Shall I tell you who are most perfect in faith? They are the ones who are best in morals as endowed with affable personalities, making friends and proving beloved friends."[5] He (pbuh) also said, "A believer is an affable person who kindly befriends others, and there is no good in a person devoid of affability that s/he befriends none and is not anyone's favorite friend."[6] In reaffirmation of this lofty meaning, the Prophet (pbuh) said, "A servant of Allah with high morals can win the greatest degrees and most honorable ranks in the Hereafter even if her/his worship may be moderate. Conversely, a bad-tempered person, notorious for immoral disposition, deteriorates to the lowest and worst place of Hellfire even if s/he may be a devout worshipper."[7] The young people who may think that Islam is exclusively restricted to mosques, religious rites and forms—and beyond that they are free to criticize or hurt their fellow beings and colleagues—or think that they are exceptionally privileged and superior to all others, they must wake up and pay attention to this prophetic law governing the relation between ethics and worship. Only through this way, they can save their worship from loss. Or else, they are taking the same way of that woman whose tongue led her to Hellfire.

Dear young people,

In the light of these universal frameworks presented here, set out your movement, start thinking, seek learning, and identify the dividing lines between the mind guided by the light of Divine revelation in its authentic texts and the unrestrained destructive

---

4 Al-Ḥākim, *al-Mustadrak*, 4:166. He assessed it as "*authentic*," on the authority of Abu Hurayrah (Allah be pleased with him).

5 Muḥammad Ibn Nasr Al-Marwazi, *Qadru ṣ-Ṣalah*.

6 Al-Ḥākim, *al-Mustadrak*, 4:166. He assessed it as "authentic and fulfilling the conditions of al-Bukhari and Muslim." "I know no defect with it though neither of them recorded it in his Hadith collections," he said.

7 Al-Ṭabarāni, *Al-Muʻjamu l-Kabīr*, (Hadith: 754); Ad-Ḍiyā'u l-Maqdisi, *Al-'Aḥādīth al-Mukhtārah,* (Hadith: 1812). He assessed its chain of transmission as good.

mind which brings ruins to all. Know that the mind has its limits but revelation has its own scope. Any confusion concerning their roles or any absolute reliance on only one of them will surely lead to disorder and conflict. The unrestricted intellectual or rational activity only occurs due to the fall of the dividing lines between these two scopes when the mind surpasses its limits only to fall into atheism and misguidance or to isolation, withdrawal, and excommunication. Both cases are forms of mental and intellectual disorder. Ultimately, they lead to nothing but aberration in reasoning and inference. In this regard, the conclusion of Muslim scholastic theologians stands unique and wonderful. They set out the hairsplitting difference between rational evidence and textual evidence and specified the areas appropriate for each, concluding that refuting anyone of them results in rendering them both invalid and false.

There is another point I want to stress in this brief message, which is patriotism and national loyalty, especially at this crucial juncture in the history of Egypt and the Arab Nation. We all, old and young, must respond positively to match the level of responsibility expected of us to shoulder. You should repeatedly remember the trust of homeland with which you will meet your Lord and for which you will inevitably be called into account. It is also a responsibility in this world as recorded by history and preserved in the memory of time. "History is merciless," as it is usually reiterated. As such, be keen to keep your historic records of patriotism pure and honorable. Let the future generations hold your memories in praise and gratitude as we hold the memories of the Egyptian youth during the last century for their firm stand against colonization and the then conspirators and corruptors in Egypt. Stand by the interests of your homeland. This homeland is the source and provider of our food, drink, education, comfort and pleasure. Do not be like those traitors who take with the right hand and stab in the back with the left hand. That is by no means the ethics of men noted for manhood and loyalty.

Dear young people,

Do not think that I am here to just remind you of your duties while heedless of your problems, distresses and pains. Although I have left the time of youth altogether, I never forgot the pains of my generation when I was young. We were even blamed for troubles created by imposed circumstances that we never took part in creating. We had to pay for the mistakes done by others and to be blamed instead of others. We underwent wars and knew their destructive consequences as well as their social and economic crises, especially closing all the doors for social justice and equality before us. Although you experience similar problems, it remains within your wisdom, acumen, and patience to overcome them so long as you are backed a with resolute will, calm and well-balanced thought, and right vision of reality and events as well as the plots and conspiracies contrived overseas against region. Read the reality in a rightly guided manner while determined to face and resolve these problems. Turn your back from improper solutions that proved infeasible and useless in dealing with contemporary transformations and challenges. You should give up the insistent pursuit after government jobs, and never waste years of your youth waiting for them in reluctance to manual works and jobs. Neither should you stay busy with empty fondness of forms and appearances or unduly be given to cozy and comfortable life. It is necessary to abandon all these inherited practices, if you wish to develop the Egyptian community and move it towards work, production, expected social justice, and equality.

In the meanwhile, all officials must share young people their austerity, distress, worries, and pains by virtue of practical plans, apart from empty slogans, usually ridiculed and branded by young people as useless and irrelevant to their realities. I have a dream to see the rich entrepreneurs and investors investing their wealth in alleviating the suffering of young people giving a hand to create an actual concrete development. I frequently wonder, in sorrow and suspicion, why the wealthy people refrain from investing their wealth in building low-cost housing units for the indigent youth to

help them have psychological stability and build their small families. The culture of a society loaded with concerns on marital costs is replete with meaningless complications with no change. Why?!

Actually, things have gone beyond all tolerable limits. Where is the role of jurists, scholars, preachers, media personnel, intelligentsia, and artists in changing these bad habits, which Islam came to eliminate and destroy by striking at their very foundations? Evidently, the Prophet of Islam (pbuh) worked on facilitating the means to marriage and reduced its costs to become even equal to "a handful of barley" or "an iron ring"? A wide distance is there between a handful of barley or an iron ring on the one hand, and a handful of gold or a diamond ring on the other, let alone other vanities in which some rich families take pride in, only to distress the feelings of the poor and agonize the senses of the needy. Actually, they hurt the feelings of the entire society, driving some young people to moral deviation or physical and mental suffering.

Dear young people,

I know that you keep wondering about terrorism, Dāʿsh (ISIS) and other violent groups. I know that you are not unaware of the truth of these armed organizations and the circumstances of their birth. As seen, they are born with clutches, claws and talons. They are maliciously created and devised for some hidden purposes. Currently, enmity is declared as past hidden plans have become exposed. I think you heard the presidents of some states exchange accusations of buying oil from terrorist organizations in our Arab Lands. Would you not wonder if the defeat of a ruler, even a tyrant, entails the decimation of countries and peoples, killing three fourths of a million of men, women and children in one war within one country? I will leave that painful answer to your acumen and awareness. Your generation may even be more aware of these contexts and circumstances than ours, as our journey is inclined to sunset.

Dear young people,

I would like to conclude my speech affirming that Al-Azhar is so happy to open all the doors for your intellectual contributions and inspiring suggestions expected to enhance Al-Azhar mission in promoting the culture of social peace at the national, regional, and international levels. It also comes in assertion of human brotherhood and universal human colleagueship to instill the right concepts of religion and Sharia deeply in the minds of young people and to protect them from delusive intellectual polarizations and calls to intolerance, extremism, killing and taking up arms against secure civilians and peaceful people. I hope you hold dialogues with Al-Azhar scholars and young generations to reciprocate views, know more about each other, and identify the challenges that face each party.

Thank you for your kind listening!
As-Salamu ʿAlaykum wa Raḥmatu Allāhi wa Barakatuh

Professor Aḥmad At-Tayyeb
The Grand Imam of Al-Azhar
Ṣafar 18, 1437 AH/December 1, 2015

The Speech of H.E. the Grand Imam of AL-Azhar in Nigeria

In the Name of Allah, the Most Beneficent, the Most Mercy
May Allah's Peace and Blessings be upon our Prophet, his family and companions!
May Allah bestow His peace and blessings upon you!

In the beginning of my speech, I would like to extend my profound thanks to Mr. President, Muḩammadu Buhari and his Deputy, Prof. Yemi Osinbajo for inviting me to visit Nigeria and meet with its scholars, thinkers and intellectuals in order to foster the fraternal ties between the Egyptian and Nigerian peoples. These ties, as you know, are strong, and historic ones that have been characterized by cooperation on various regional and international sides. Al-Azhar Al-Sharif's visit affirms to all the honored Nigerian sects that Islam, as we teach and have been taught at Al-Azhar, is the religion of humanity and regional and international peace. Islam has never called and will never call for violence, blood shedding, distress or disasters that may hurt the innocent.

We have come here so that Muslims here as well as non-Muslims would gain more certainty that Islam is a religion of peace. Islam does not only extend peace to the human beings, but also to the animals, plants, inanimate beings and the entire universe. We also believe that the other divine faiths instruct this value as Islam, for they all were revealed by Allah, the Exalted, who described Himself in the Qur'ān as the Most Merciful, the Mercy-Giving, the Most Loving, the All Subtle, the Most Compassionate, and the All Forgiving, who forgives sins and accepts sincere repentance. Allah is also the All Powerful, the Omnipotent, the Supreme Avenger and the Overpowering One over those who transgress against people, shed their blood and make them live in distress and sorrow. Allah has decreed that the wrongdoers will not escape his punishment, whether now or later. Allah says, "Never think that Allah is unaware of what the

wrongdoers do. He only gives them respite until a Day when their eyes will stare (in horror)." (Qurʾān, 14:42)

Dear Brothers,

It never crossed the minds of the early Muslims that a day would come when the Muslims would have to travel everywhere to defend their religion and reveal its essence and reality because a group of those who falsely attribute themselves to Islam have made Islam a target of accusation and distorted its image. They have been keen on disseminating videos of beheading to international satellite channels in remarkable insistence, which proves that the objective behind this horror broadcast globally is to distort the image of Islam globally and to present it as a religion of violence, blood shedding and brutality. We need to search for those who benefit from this havoc, and those who stand behind these dreadful crimes by providing them with money at times, and with arms, supplies and devilish plans at others. Those criminals also find those who provide legal justifications for their crimes.

Dear Brothers,

I do not wish to make reiterated statements as I remind you of things you already know, or even know by heart, about the tolerance and respect that Islam shows to the others who differ from us in terms of religion, belief, race, color and language. Although this is not a context for elaboration, reminder is still needed as this affliction, or satanic entity has started to achieve its evil objectives represented in disseminating hatred for Islam and the Muslims among the followers of the other religions and the majority of the people of the West who have begun to wonder apprehensively: "Is real Islam what Muslim scholars represent to us? Or is it what we see on TV channels? Undoubtedly, visual depicted information is better perceived and more easily remembered than spoken or written information. Therefore, I deem it necessary to provide you with some facts that must be understood by Muslims and non-Muslims—facts that we have to

declare at present in order to find a way out of the bloody crises that strike the entire world. Only the poor and misery-stricken people have to pay for such crises, shed tears and experience death, havoc, and loss of their beloved ones.

I would like to pose a question, an honest answer to which, in my opinion, represents the first step towards regaining the proper understanding and real concept of Islam. The question is, "What is the relationship between Islam and the divine faiths that preceded it? Is it a relationship of tension, mistrust and apprehension? Or is it a relationship of cordiality and common understanding?

You might be surprised if I tell you that this question could be deemed illogical because, according to the Qurʾān, the word *islam* did not use to denote a particular religion, but it is rather a description of the common religion that all the Prophets called for, and which was adopted by those who believed in their messages. The Qurʾān dubbed Abraham (pbuh) as *muslim* (submissive) and *ḥanīf* (devoutly obedient to Allah) even though Abraham was of course not a follower of the message of Prophet Muḥammad (pbuh) that later came, thousands of years after Abraham. Allah used the same description for the other previous Prophets. He reported Ishmael and Isaac as saying, "Our Lord, and make us *muslim* (submissive) to You and from our descendants a *muslim* (submissive) nation to You." (Qurʾān, 2:128) The children of Jacob are also reported, when addressing their father, as saying, "We will worship your Allah and the Allah of your forefathers, Abraham, Ishmael and Isaac—one Allah. We are all *musilm* (in submission) to Him." (Qurʾān 2:133) Noah is reported as saying, "I have been commanded to be of the *muslim* (submissive ones)."(Qurʾān 10:72) Moses says, "My people, if you have really believed in Allah, then rely upon Him, if you should be real *muslim* (submissive)."(Qurʾān 10:84). The disciples of Jesus say, "We have believed in Allah and testified that we are *muslim* (submissive to Him)." (Qurʾān 3:52)

Based on this fact, the Qurʾān states another fact that the message of Islam shares the same core and essence with the

previous Divine messages. This means that Allah (Glory be to Him) has not sent for Muslims a completely new religion; rather, Allah has revealed to the Muslims the same message revealed to previous Prophets and nations, as Allah says, "He has ordained for you in religion what He enjoined upon Noah and that which We have revealed to you, [Prophet Muḥammad], and what We enjoined upon Abraham and Moses and Jesus—to establish the religion and not be divided therein. Difficult for those who associate others with Allah is that to which you invite them. Allah chooses for Himself whom He wills and guides to Himself whoever turns back [to Him]." (Qur'ān, 42 13)

Thus, the Qur'ān confirms the previous Divine Scriptures. Moreover, the Qur'ān has described both the Torah and the Gospel as containing guidance and light–the same as the Qur'ān. The Qur'ān reads, "Indeed, We sent down the Torah, in which there was guidance and light. The Prophets who submitted [to Allah] judged by it for the Jews." (Qur'ān, 5: 44) It also says, "We gave him [Jesus] the Gospel, in which there was guidance and light, confirming that which preceded it of the Torah as guidance and instruction for the righteous." (Qur'ān, 5: 46)

The Qur'ān states that each one of these Divine Scriptures confirms the previous ones. Prophet Muḥammad (pbuh) describes the relation between him and the previous Messengers, though they may be of remote times or places, in a very impressive way when he says, "Among the whole of humankind, I am the closest to Jesus son of Mary among in this worldly life and the next life. All the Prophets are of different mothers but belong to one religion." He meant that all the Prophets are like brothers who have the same father but different mothers; the father in this figurative simile is the faith which is shared by all of them, but the mothers –who are different- are the legislations given to every Prophet which differed in accordance with the variance of nations, and the times in which different prophets were sent. In this regard, we have a famous legal maxim that states, "The Sharia of past nations is our Sharia so long as it is not abrogated."

Based on this Qur'ānic stance which is as clear as day time, it is not a matter of exaggeration to disregard any question about the relation between Islam and other religions because such question seems a question about the relation between one and the same thing–totally illogical, isn't it?

You may ask, having such a relation of mutual respect, love and respect of mutual rights between Islam and other Divine religions, what about the followers of other non-heavenly religions?

My answer is that the Qur'ān has detailed the rules of the relationship with the Jews and the Christians because Judaism and Christianity represent the biggest religions adopted in Arabia as well as the surrounding areas of Persia and Rome at the time of the revelation of the Qur'ān. As for other religions such as Hinduism, Buddhism and Confucianism, they were unknown for the Arabs at that time. However, the teachings of the Qur'ān and the Prophetic Sunnah have covered the relation with such religions, when stating the general rule that governs the relation between Muslims and non-Muslims in general, basing this relation on the values of justice and fairness with the followers of any other faith or ideology as long as they do not transgress against the Muslims or expel them from their lands: "Allah does not forbid you, concerning those who do not fight you in connection with religion and do not expel you from your homes, from being righteous toward them or acting justly toward them. Indeed, Allah loves those who act justly. Allah only forbids you, concerning those who fight you in connection with religion and expel you from your homes and aid in your expulsion, from make allies with them. Whoever makes allies with them are wrongdoers." (Qur'ān, 60: 8-9)

The Qur'ān bases this stance on the fact that it regards all the human beings as equal, as they are all the children of one father and one mother. A non-Muslims is thus the brother of a Muslim in humanity. Thus, it is a human unity in which one approaches the other, and no one is preferred to another except with good deeds.

Gentlemen!

A religion based on such values and clear-cut texts cannot be described as a religion of violence, terrorism or extremism. It is not a matter of wisdom to judge religions by the atrocities of few of their followers, who are blinded and misguided. Anyway, it is better for non-Muslims to be fair and to negate such unfounded claims; otherwise no Divine religion is free from the accusation of terrorism and killing innocents in the name of religion.

Having stated such stance, it is necessary to understand how Islam regulates the relationship between Muslims and non-Muslims. Is it a relationship of peace or killing?

To answer such a question, it is good to start with a hopefully clear brief of some Qurʾānic verses that can provide us with Divine laws that govern this issue.

The first law is that which we can call the law of variation that is the Will of Allah to create His creatures different from one another. Had Allah willed to create humans with one faith, color or language, He would have done so. This difference is a reality and we know that there are no two persons with the same fingerprint or iris recognition. As the Qurʾān states, this law of variation affirms that it will continue to the end of life. Allah says, "If your Lord had so willed, He would have made all humankind one community [of believers]; but they will not cease to [choose to] differ, except those showed Mercy by your Lord, and so He created them [free to choose]." (Qurʾān, 11: 118-119); "To each of you We prescribed a law and a method," (Qurʾān, 5: 48); and "It is He who created you, and among you is a disbeliever, and a believer. Allah is All Seeing of what you do,." (Qurʾān, 64: 2)

Thus, variation among people is a Divine law as stated in the Qurʾān in decisive texts. This necessitates that the relationship between those varied people should reflect the nature of variation itself, rather than contradict it. It is illogical that Allah wills to create the human beings different but then asks them to force one another against their own nature or orders them to kill each other due to something against their choice. Therefore the Qurʾān states the freedom of religion:

- “There is no compulsion in religion.” (Qurʾān, 2: 256)
- “So, whoever wills, let him believe; and whoever wills, let him disbelieve.” (Qurʾān, 18: 29)
- “Would you compel people in order that they become believers?" (Qurʾān, 10: 99) “If Allah had so willed, He would have united them upon guidance. So, never be of the ignorant.” (Qurʾān, 6: 35)
- “You are not to control them [in terms of their bekief].” (Qurʾān, 88: 22)

Here, the Qurʾān answers our question about the societal and international relations in Islam. It states that so long as Allah has created humans different from one another and granted them the freedom of faith, there is no way to deny that the relations between them should be based on peace. To use the Qurʾānic term, it is a relation of t*a'āruf* (knowing one another); the Qurʾān says, “Humankind, We have created you from a male and a female and made you communities and tribes so that you may know one another. Indeed, the most noble of you in the sight of Allah is the most pious. Indeed, Allah is All Knowing, All Acquainted.” (Qurʾān, 49: 13)

As such, the major issues are put in the Qurʾān in a logical order, which is not open for distortion. It is variation in human attitudes that leads to freedom of faith. It in turn entails a relation of peace among the humans. In this way, Islam is perfectly a religion of peace, as it is perfectly a religion of equality. Having understood this, it becomes completely wrong to claim that the motive behind fighting in Islam is the others’ disbelief. This is a lie to Islam and to the conduct of the Messenger of Islam (pbuh). The truth that should be stated in this regard is that the motive behind fight in Islam is to resist aggression and not at all the difference in religion. Otherwise, how could we understand the literature of jurisprudence that has kept for us the rules for fighting and clearly stated how the Muslims should behave in their new regions.

Muslims have always given the inhabitants of any country they conquered the right to keep their faiths and granted them the rights of citizenship as they applied the rule that "they have the same rights and duties as we do." In no one case did Muslims compel peoples to accept Islam or die. This is what the message of the Prophet sent to the people of Yemen approved, as the message stated, “Those who are Jews or Christians should not be forced to abandon their religions.”

According to another narration reported by Abdur-Razzāq, the Prophet said, “He who hates Islam from the Jews or Christians should not be forced to abandon his religion.” The books of *Tafsīr* (Exegesis of the Qur’ān) agree that the verse, “There is no compulsion in religion” (Qur’ān, 2: 256) has been revealed regarding a man from Al-Anṣār (the inhabitants of Medina who supported Prophet Muḩammad, pbuh) who had two Christian sons. He asked Prophet Muḩammad (pbuh) "Should I force them to accept Islam, for they refused to abandon Christianity?" The Prophet forbade him from doing that, and thereafter the above-mentioned verse was revealed. So, in the face of these clear-cut proofs and the practice of Prophet Muḩammad (pbuh), there is no way to accept the wrong interpretation and misleading understanding that Islam is a religion that loves blood shedding, killing, capturing free women and selling them in a humiliating manner.

Dignified scholars,

You may agree with me that there is no way but to promote sound understanding of our religion, as Muslims have practiced it over ages. Besides, it has become necessary for scholars to interact with real world and assume the responsibility of issuing *fatāwa* (religious verdicts). It is the duty of Muslim scholars to present the true Islam as a religion of fraternity, mutual knowing, and cooperating with the others. They have to spread peace among people in the East and the West and forbid aggression against people. This is the way we find in Islam. Islam is unique in how it

forbids intentional killing, imposing severe penalty upon the killer in the worldly life and the Hereafter.

Venerable scholars, it is inevitable to regain the sound understanding of diversity which was one of the most significant factors in the progress of the Muslim Nation. Through understanding the natural law of diversity, we can distinguish between natural variance and aggressive difference, for the later has badly affected the Muslim Nation. In light of this difference, indecisive issues were seen as decisive ones; unclear texts were treated as clear one; and general rules seen as specific ones. In light of the laws of diversity, we can regain common grounds that all the Muslims agreed upon in terms of creed and Shariʿah, and to let people follow the opinions they have always been practicing. The criterion, distinguishing what is right from what is wrong is the consensus of the all the Muslim scholars of the Nation. In addition, we cannot identify only one Mazhab (school of Muslim jurisprudence) for people to follow in faith and worship, imposing it through invitation and intimidation. We have to teach our coming generations how the righteous predecessors among the Companions of the Prophet (peace be upon them) disagreed with one another, but they did not disunite. It was the chaos of difference, shortage of knowledge, which spread *takfīr* (accusations of disbelief) and violence and enabled evil powers to weaken our unity.

Dignified scholars,

I know that I have discussed in detail some issues that are known to you, but most likely they are vague to many of our youths, especially the Muslim and non-Muslim university students. I do not know, till now, any curriculum, whether in the university or pre-university education, that seriously discuss these issues to reveal their truth and eliminate their ambiguity in the minds of the youth to protect them against falling as a prey to the armed violence calls in the name of Islam. Since the last year, Al-Azhar Al-Sharif started teaching two curricula to the students of Al-Azhar institutes to counter issues of terrorism such as *takfīr*, *hijrah* (migration), *ḥākimiyyah* (the right to rule), *jāhiliyyah*

(ignorance of pre-Islamic period), caliphate (selecting the supreme Muslim ruler), and other issues that the terrorists employ and abuse. Moreover, we started sending peace envoys all over the world, the last one being sent to Nigeria in April. Also, we have provided training to the preachers from different counties all over the world at Al-Azhar, and held conferences in which the most prominent Muslim scholars from all over the world participated, including Nigerian scholars headed by the Nigerian Mufti Ibrahim Saleh Al-Hoseiny.

Gentlemen,

Please, accept my apology for the long speech which I would like to conclude by stating that my visit to Nigeria is a visit to the whole Nigerian people with its different groups and sects, hoping to support its unity, stability and educational and scientific progress. I hope it will help the progress of all Africa and bring back the ancient glory of the Nigerian people in gathering both religious and worldly sciences in harmony.

Al-Azhar is pleased to offer support for this civilizational process. You may know that more than 3,500 students of your children study at Al-Azhar, and about 4,000 of them have already received scholarships from Al-Azhar. For years, Al-Azhar has been offering thirty scholarships a year for your children. In this visit, Al-Azhar has decided to increase that number to fifty scholarships per year to students who desire to study at Al-Azhar University, provided that this increase be allocated to students of scientific faculties such as Medicine, Pharmacy, Engineering, etc. Through its missionary and educational envoys, Al-Azhar spreads proper religious knowledge that is completely far from hateful sectarian ideas which incite hatred and sow disunity among the Nigerian people.

Thank you for your attentive listening!

As-Salamu ʿAlaykum wa Raḥmatu Allāh wa Barakatuh

Peace be upon you

Professor Aḥmad At-Tayyeb

The Grand Imam of Al-Azhar

Dialogue
Between East and West Elders

Geneva, Switzerland, on Sep. 30, 2016

A Speech by H. E. Professor Ahmad At-Tayyeb, the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar at the Inauguration of Dialogue between the Muslim Council of Elders and the World Council of Churches

In the Name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful
Ladies and Gentlemen,
As-Salamu ʿAlaykum wa Raḩmatu Allāhi wa Barakatuh
Peace be upon you

Allow me at the outset to extend my sincere thanks and appreciation to you for inviting me to attend this meeting held in such critical circumstances our world experiences today. The entire humanity undergoes a moral crisis, to the extent that the meanings of love and peace are viewed as an exception to the main rule of selfishness, hate, and dispute governing the world today. Frankly, I am telling the truth when I say that no single nation but longs to permanent peace and to a life free from violence and terrorism. It is deeply regrettable that fingers are pointed in accusation of religions as the creators of that abhorrent terrorism.

In reality, those people, who accuse religion of causing terrorism, are unaware of two important facts in this regard. Firstly, religions aim to instill peace pillars amongst people, to eradicate oppression, and to strictly prohibit people from unlawful shedding of human blood. As you all know, my faith in Islam is derived from the word *peace*. Moreover, As-salām (Peace) is one of Allah's attributes. He, the Exalted, is named the All-Merciful, the Most Compassionate, the All Pitying, the Loving, and the Subtly Kind. Likewise, the Messenger of Islam, Prophet Muḩammad (pbuh) defined the true Muslim as "the one from [the harm of] whose tongue and hand people are safe". As for the second fact, terrorism–of which religions in general and Islam in particular are accused— does not distinguish between a religious person and an atheist, nor does it distinguish between Muslims and non-Muslims.

A quick look at the victims of terrorism ensures that the Muslims are the people who pay the highest price of terrorist acts as their blood is shed and their corps are severed. Terrorism does not only occur in the East where it strikes many countries such as Iraq, Pakistan, Lebanon, Egypt, Libya and the torn-apart Syria, where more than one thousand mosques have been demolished so far and more than 400,000 people were murdered. It also exists in Europe where Muslim Europeans' blood is also shed in terrorist attacks. Nevertheless, the great loss to Muslims is that their religion and its followers are being accused with terrorism. This accusation has been frequently leveled against them, leading some extremist rightists to adopt a discourse of hate. Accordingly, they offend religions and call for separating religion from the lives of people and deporting its followers from their countries, while their houses of worship are being assaulted. Thus, innocent people are caught between the devil and the deep blue sea—the devil of terrorism and the deep blue sea of the *Islamophobia*

Ladies and Gentlemen

It is not my main concern here to defend religions against these oppressive accusations. You surely know that it is all a stark calumny. However, I want to affirm that the primary and genuine responsibility of religions is to foster and promote peace in all the corners of the world. This is the universal objective of all religions. All religions, with no exception, prohibit blood shedding, slandering and seizure of others' property. I have never recognized a divine religion allowing blood shedding, rights infringement and intimidation of safe people. I do believe that peace never prevails, nor can people enjoy it, unless the religious institutions and their leaders cooperatively work towards such objectives.

Here, before you, I would like to reiterate what Al-Azhar has called for since more than seventy years in Egypt and in some European capitals. Peace should be achieved among the religious leaders at first and then between them and the intellectuals on the

one hand and the decision makers on the other before it can be possible among ordinary people.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In fact, statements of condemnation by people of religions against violent and terrorist operations as well as hate rhetoric are insufficient. It seems that we are working in isolated islands. Such work produces weak outcomes lacking effective tangible impact in the real world. Therefore, we need to coordinate to carry out a joint work combating violence through a global realistic project. There is need for a project to be supervised by religious leaders through holding a number of meetings probing in depth the causes of this phenomenon and deciding upon the most important proposed solutions to effectively confront it on intellectual, scholarly, social and educational bases.

It is worth mentioning that Al-Azhar has recently introduced a new subject in its curricula to educate the students on the dangers of terrorism and extremism as immunity against falling prey to violent ideologies or joining terrorist groups lifting Islamic mottos while pursuing armed violence. Meanwhile, it is incumbent upon religions to assume their roles in educating youth in the importance of mercy and compassion through holding major international youth forums. Such forums should focus on clarifying religious concepts, particularly fostering the concept of citizenship without discrimination on the basis of religion or race.

Such is the basis for plurality, freedom, equality, tolerance, and respect to others' beliefs. The Prophet of Islam (pbuh) had applied these concepts before the modern world constitutions were drafted, when he (pbuh) established these concepts among the citizens of Medina upon his migration. He stated that "the believers and Muslims of Quraysh (in Mecca) and Yathrib (Medina) and the Jews are all one nation, and that the Jews of the Banu 'Auf represent one community with the believers; the Jews have their religion and the Muslims have theirs)."

Thus, the Prophet (pbuh) instilled the principle of equality between the Muslim and the non-Muslim citizens in his early state and recorded it in a document known as "the Constitution of Medina." In this context, we reaffirm that belief in the value of this principle implies salvation from countless religious and social problems in both Eastern and Western states.

The Islamic Sharia has always emphasized that the Muslims in the East shall consider the followers of other faiths as fellow citizens taking part in establishing and defending the nation. The Sharia maxim is as follows: “They [non-Muslim fellow citizens] equally share our rights and duties.” Al-Azhar has always called on Muslims in the West to truly consider themselves as part of their societies where they should integrate and react positively in order to achieve social peace.

Undoubtedly, in this context, the religious leaders have a role not to be ignored, i.e. to remove the psychological barriers erected by propagandists of violence, isolation, and hatred among the followers of different faiths. This role entails highlighting multiple facts, on top of which is that such diversity is a Allah-dictated norm that must never give rise to conflict, seclusion or war. Otherwise, the situation would result in a contradiction between freedom of diversity and confiscation of this right.

In conclusion, I hope that we together develop our efforts to confront all the manifestations and practices that stand in the way of promoting peace, mercy and justice among people in the East and the West. I also hope that we formulate an integrated humanitarian draft agreement that may lead us to bring about a positive effect on the current affairs. I pray that we offer enough good deeds by which we deserve Allah's Forgiveness and Mercy on the Day of Judgment.

Al-Salamu Alaykum wa Rahmatu Allahi wa Barakatuh

Professor Aḥmad At-Tayyeb
The Grand Imam of Al-Azhar

Al-Azhar Sheikhdom
26th, Dhu Al-Hijja 26, 1437 AH (Sep. 27, 2016)

The Opening Speech of His Eminence the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar at the Burmese – Myanmar Meeting

In his opening speech at the Burmese Youth Dialogue Forum for Peace, the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar states:

- The crisis in Rakhine poses a serious threat to Myanmar.
- There is nothing more damaging to a nation than killing in the name of religion and race.
- It is Allah's Will for humankind to have variant religions, complexions, tongues and races.
- Minority is a negatively-wretched concept, usually leading to bloodshed and displacement of the innocent.
- Discrimination in Myanmar will aggravate the tensions and even hold back all ambitions to progress and development.
- Equal citizenship to all citizens of Myanmar, regardless of religion or race, is the only way to defuse the climate of rancor and hatred.
- We hope that Myanmar would benefit from "the Egyptian Family House" experience that succeeded in entrenching the concept of full citizenship and coexistence in a short period

In the Name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful

Myanmar Meeting Speech

Ladies and Gentlemen

As-Salamu 'Alaykum wa Raḩmatu Allahi wa Barakatuh

Peace be upon you!

I would like to initiate my speech with sending my sincere congratulations on the New Year with devoted prayers for Allah to bless the world with a new happy year of peace and security for the entire humanity. May Allah make it a time that put an end to bloodshed and put out the fire of wars among the fellow humans belonging to nations, religions, and humanity at large.

It is pleasure for the Muslim Council of Elders (MCE) to invite a selected group of the Myanmar youth, males and females, from different religions and races, and welcome them in their second home Egypt—such a pure country where religions melt into one national

fiber forming a solid rock against the plots of malicious criminals and destroyers, who espouse evils and aim to devastate nations.

Dear brothers and children of Myanmar,

You are in no need of further clarification on the gravely immanent threats to your home resulting from the ongoing crisis of Rakhine State. Actually, this crisis finds no justification whatsoever in religion, humanity or the ethics of civilization. It is really extraneous to the ancient nation of Myanmar endowed with a long history of faith, wisdom and peace, which formed for long a rich source of enlightenment for humankind. Your civilization and religions proved to act as torches of peace for the entire humanity. Indeed, nothing is more damaging to a nation than killing in the name of religion or race; it destroys life and leads to bloodshed. Neither did the Prophets and Messengers come to incite killing. The wise and Godly people never wish to provoke persecution or displacement of the innocent.

Conversely, all divine religions, scriptures and teachings assert that the Divine Will of the Supreme Lord has willed to create the human beings different in religion, colors, languages and races. Had the Lord so willed, He would have made all people follow the same religion or have the same complexion, language or race. He is the Omnipotent. However, all religions affirm the central truth of the philosophy of creation and formation: "Among His signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the diversity of your tongues and colors: for in this there are messages indeed for all who are possessed of [innate] knowledge!" (Qur'ān, 30:22) The fraternity of faith teaches us the fraternity of humankind. For a believer, a human fellow is either a brother in faith or a brother in humanity. In the wake of his prayers, the Prophet of Islam (pbuh) frequently addressed His Lord saying, "O Allah, Our Lord and Lord of everything, I bear witness that Muḥammad is Your Servant and Messenger. Allah, our Lord and the Lord of everything, I bear witness that all the servants [human beings] are brethren" (Abu Dawud, *Kitābu l-Ṣalāh*).

There is no greater evidence than such testimony that opens the gates of human fraternity wide for all people without any reservation on the basis of gender, color, race or religion. Religions teach us that Allah creates all the human beings—the believers and the unbelievers

alike. As Muslims, we read in the Qur'ān: "He is the One who created you, then among you there is the unbeliever, and among you there is the believer. Allah is fully watchful of everything you do." (Qur'ān, 64:2) In their commentary on this verse, the Qur'ānic scholars held the view that the unbeliever came first in order as an indication that unbelief is more dominant among people. We shall know that the Divine Wisdom is far above creating the unbelievers and then commanding the believers to kill and eradicate them. Clearly, such presumption is meaningless and goes against the wisdom of the Creator. He is the Creator and the Initiator of the whole creation.

The early Muslim tradition declares, "The creations are the dependents of Allah; the most beloved ones to Allah are the most beneficial to His dependents." The wise call, good advice, and sweet words are the only way for human relations between believers and unbelievers. Beyond that, each one has to allow the other full freedom to choose their way of life. In his letter to the people of Yemen, the Prophet (pbuh) said, "Anyone of the Jews or the Christians who chooses not to accept Islam shall have full freedom of belief and face no compulsion to convert from his religion." The Noble Qur'ān clearly puts it, "Say: 'The truth has now come from your Lord;' let, him who wills believe, and let him who wills disbelieve." (Qur'ān, 18:29) If the followers of all religions approve this human set of ethics in building their human relationship, it will be impossible to ignore freedom or confine it to the brethren of a certain religion to the exclusion of others, let alone the confiscation of all other consequent human rights and ethical duties.

Dear Burmese young people of all races and religions, the wisdom of Buddhism, Hinduism, Christianity and Islam, with which your land is deeply rich, call upon you day and night: "Never kill, steal or tell a lie! Preserve your chastity and refrain from drinking alcohols." During the years of our studies at Al-Azhar's Faculty of *Uṣūlu d-Deen* (Theology), we learned from the wisdom of the east that Buddhism is a set of human and moral teachings in the first place and that the Silent Wise Buddha is one of the greatest figures in the history of humanity. He was exceptionally noted for serenity, rationality, kindness, sympathy and promotion of love. The notable senior historians of

religions in the world described his teachings as “an endless source of mercy.” As a source of mercy, Buddha was a peaceful and kind person free from arrogance and vain pride. He was very lenient and gracious to people. His recommendations encourage love and kindness to others. I remind of this figure to stress that the Council of Elders pins great hopes on you— young males and females. We hope that you grow the seeds of peace whose trees shall bless the Rakhine State and all the citizens of Burma with peace. Take the lead and promote the culture of citizenship to overcome the concept of “minorities” and the evil consequences of exclusion and marginalization incurred by this wretched concept, which finally result in bloodshed and displacement of the innocent.

We shall know that the gruesome images of killings, persecutions and chases aired via media are not befitting a great nation with prestigious civilization like that of Burma. The discrimination in Myanmar will aggravate the tensions and even hold back all national ambitions to progress and development as wished by the Council of Elder and myself as well as this selected group of Egyptian scholars, intellectuals, and media men. We hope that this bleak image hurtful to human feelings in the east and the west comes to an end. We—the Council of Elders and Al-Azhar— urge the people of Myanmar to actualize the principle of equal citizenship to all the citizens in the community, regardless of religions or races, as the only way to defuse the climate of rancor and hatred. The Council of Elders stands ready to offer all aspects of cooperation and assistance for the promotion and establishment of these principles. Here, we also introduce the experience of "the Egyptian Family House" composed of Muslim and Christian Egyptians, which succeeded in entrenching the concept of full citizenship and coexistence in a short period.

Dear youth,

It is no secret that the Council of Elders has long been concerned with the issue of peace in Myanmar. After deep contemplation and extensive studies, we found out that the shortest way to understanding and dialogue lies in the minds of the young citizens of Burma. They are most capable of overcoming this crisis which, if left, will inevitably devastate everything in its path. Truly, the youth are more open-

minded, purer in hearts, and watchful in conscience, and more enthusiastically ambitious for peace. At last, I hope this meeting marks a first step to hold other meetings on the path of making just and lasting peace for Myanmar. I am hopeful that the Council of Elders would listen to you and recognize your pains and hopes to do the best we can in relieving your pains and helping your dreams come true. Thank you all. My thanks are also to all those who participated in supporting your issue.

As-Salamu ʽAlaykum wa Raḥmatu Allahi wa Barakatuh

THE IMAM'S FOREWORD
TO
THE INTERNATIONAL PEACE DELEGATIONS BOOK

Foreword
By
His Eminence
The Grand Imam of Al-Azhar

Professor Ahmad At-Tayyeb
The Grand Sheikh of Al-Azhar and President of the Muslim Council of Elders

Undoubtedly, redefining and demonstrating the importance of the culture of peace in Islam is one of the noblest purposes that must be the core of scholars' concerns and writings. They should focus on removing misreading and misinterpretation-based ambiguity and confusion related to the *fiqh* of peace, which causes a small group of Muslims to bear arms in face of their communities and families instead of the enemies and fighters.

The culture of peace is an essential constituent of the Islamic civilization. Such civilization was not to spread all over the world in a short period of time leaving scholars of history and civilization in deep surprise up to this day unless it was based on the establishment of peace among all peoples. In addition, the Prophet of such civilization has not only been sent as mercy to humankind, but also to the realms of animals, plants, and inanimate objects: "We have not sent you, [O Muḥammad], except as a mercy to the worlds" (the Qurʾān, 21:107). Mercy necessitates peace and both are two sides of the same coin. I think there is no religious, social, or constitutional system that shows mercy to humanity and protects the sanctity of human blood as the Prophet of Islam did.

It is known that there is no book other than the Qurʾān tat prescribes two punishments for anyone who commits, intentionally and unintentionally, the crime of murder. S/He should be killed in this world and have great torment in the Hereafter. It is sufficient to say that the Qurʾān makes the sins of killing one soul, without legal right and for purpose of corruption in the earth, equal to the sins of killing all other people. Similarly, it affirms that the reward of giving life to one soul is equal to giving life to all human beings

"On that account We prescribed for the Seeds of Israel that whoever kills a self-other than for (killing another) self or for corruption in the earth-then it will be as if he had killed mankind altogether; and whoever gives life to it, then it will be as if he had given life to mankind altogether. And indeed Our Messengers have already come to them with supreme evidences; thereafter

surely many of them after that are indeed extravagant in the earth" (the Qur'ān, 5:32).

Moreover, Islam prohibits just terrifying the safe and peaceful people, even by the way of joking. The Prophet (pbuh)said, "He who points a weapon towards his brother, the angels invoke curse upon him even if he is his real brother so long as he does not abandon it."

He also said, "It is not lawful for a Muslim to frighten a Muslim. The Prophet's mercy and compassion to the animal is reflected clearly when he saw a weeping camel with very clear signs of fatigue and exhaustion upon him. He called the camel's owner, who was a young man from Al-Anṣār and said to him, "Do not you fear Allah about this beast which Allah has given in your possession? It has complained to me that you keep it hungry and load it heavily which fatigues it."

The revival of peace in Islam is no longer luxurious or optional, but a must. It is the lifeline to save not only Muslims but also the entire world from the calamities of terrorism and disasters of armed extremism. Such terroristic acts are mostly perpetrated in the name of religion. Their perpetrators use the divine books, after being maliciously misinterpreted, to attack, kill, rob, and displace the innocent people. It is necessary that all Muslims stand united to put an end to this grave danger that comes from misreading the scriptures. Such danger is supported by blind global policies and enormous funds far outweigh those spent to fight poverty, ignorance, disease, and underdevelopment in the third world countries.

The Muslim Council of Elders (MCE), to which I belong, does its utmost and spares no effort to confront this terrorism and extinguish the fire wherever it outbreaks by launching peace delegates everywhere to increase awareness of this holy objective and turn it into a reality in human lives. This objective was the reason behind launching the first peace delegation by MCE in collaboration with Al-Azhar to a number of countries in the East and the West.

We aim at learning more about Muslims in these countries and work to spread peace among them in hopes to contribute in protecting them from terrorism that does not take into account Allah's protection and mercy. This book includes the results and recommendations of the first groups of delegations and caravans of peace launched to ten countries.

These results are largely good and promising as a preliminary experience, which encourages the MCE to continue and send more delegates as part of its noble mission and duty towards the Muslim people and the entire humanity in these critical circumstances.

May Allah help the MCE achieve and perform this mission perfectly and accept this work for His sake alone! May Allah make this endeavor sincere to Him!

Aḥmad At-Tayyeb

The Grand Sheikh of Al-Azhar and President of Muslim Council of Elders

Cairo, Rabie‘ 11, 1438 AH/Jan. 10, 2017 CE

Al-Azhar Facing Misconceptions
Papers of Al-Azhar Conference to counter extremism and terrorism

Foreword by

Professor Ahmad At-Tayyeb
The Grand Imam of Al-Azhar, Chairman of the Muslim Council of Elders (MCE)

In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful

All praise is due to Allah. May Allah's Peace and Blessings be upon His Prophet Muḩammad, and upon his Family and Companions! The first part of the research papers of «Al-Azhar World Conference to Counter Extremism and Terrorism” has been issued in two editions. The first edition appeared in 2015 and the second in 2016.

It was scheduled that the second part of the conference research papers would be issued almost a year ago, especially that the copies of the first part sold well in a short time.

I think that the time is still appropriate for the issuance of the remaining part of the conference research papers, since our area is still being shaken by incidents of terrorism, murder, bombing, and destruction. Meanwhile, our religion is still challenged with absurd and inhumane arguments and disputes. Consequently, our region has been suffering a heavy toll of lives, money, blood, and damage that I think it had never paid before in its history, far and recent.

One day, history will record that the Arabs and the Muslims in the century of urbanization and human rights have not been worthy of inheriting the values of their religion whose name is derived from the very root of «*peace*» and whose Prophet is sent to be a mercy for the entire humanity. It will also be recorded that they have not stood once to get a grip on the Ever Wise Qurʾān that they recite day and night and that says, “Do not quarrel with one another, or you may be disheartened and your vigor goes away; and endure patiently; surely Allah is with the steadfast.” (Qurʾān, 8: 46)

On the contrary, they are so quarrelsome and argumentative that they wage wars against one another due to reasons that have to do with sects and sectarianism.

Unlike their ancestors, the present Muslims do not view Islam as a source of unity, strength, dignity, and invincibility. Rather, a stubborn, ignorant group of them has made it the cause of blind sedition and doomy confusing distress that are so bewildering to wise people, not to mention the obscurity of laity and common people.

Look at the civilization of Iraq and how the Iraqis destroyed it with their own hands. Take another look and see how the Iraqi blood is shed with the hands of the people of the same religion and the same nation! Had this Arab blood been shed with foreign hands, one would have understood this ordeal and figured out its reasons.

Likewise, you can look at bemoaning disasters and adversaries afflicting millions of citizens in Syria, Yemen, and Libya, who were slaughtered, displaced, and forced to roam through deserts and wastelands, due to the grim war with which they have nothing to do. If you started to ask about the direct cause that fiercely and barbarically ignited fire in the land of the Arabs, you may well conclude that it is a religion-based war or a war disguised in religion.

However, this war has nothing to do with religion at all. It has been closely associated with the domains of regional covetousness and expansions, serving sectarian agendas and obeying orders of hegemony policies. New maps are drawn, and borders are changed. The aim is to fragment the greater Arab entities, distract their efforts, and weaken their economic and military powers to ensure an eternally safe and stable settlement of a permanent colonial entity that penetrated deep into the heart of Arabism.

Organizers of this entity believed that weak neighbors would be a source of their strength, security, and safety. They forgot or rather ignored that the facts of history, geography, and the nature of things cannot provide a ship with safety from sinking while the surrounding waves are furious and wild. Such facts stipulate that

once neighbors of an entity are deprived of peace, the same entity will inevitably be deprived of peace in the long or the short run.

The direct cause that ignited this cruel war, whose beginning is known but whose end is unknown, is the rise of sectarian disputes among the Muslims themselves. Revival of Sunni-Shiite disputes have ignited war mongers, including war brokers, arms' dealers, and those who add fuel to the fire, with a platform ready to launch aircraft and missiles on three countries that are the reservoir of the oldest humanitarian and Islamic civilizations. When one contemplates on the identity of weapons used in killing men, women, and children there, one knows that the parties which manage the war and manipulate the threads of game, are all foreign. It is a proxy war.

It is fair to recognize that we, the Arabs and the Muslims, are the first to bear the religious and moral responsibility for this chaotic and absurd war before Allah and before history. We have swallowed the poisonous bait and we have been unaware of the trap in which the nation is caught, and whose leg has fallen trapped into. It is still trying to set itself free from that trap but in vain.

After the destruction that ravaged everything in the north, central, south and west of the region, no one knows when this war will come to an end, where it will take the region to, and how much the forthcoming reconstruction costs. This could result in a paralysis of the Arab economy and a serious lack of resources and components of the Arab treasures.

Of course, we, the Arabs and the Muslims, have not been alert to two fatal calamities that tightly stick to and logically entail each other:

First: As I have mentioned before, there are susceptibility to fragmentation, disagreement being sidelined to partial national interests, and lack of seriousness in dealing with the sanctity of the homeland. Some ultimate objectives are required to preserve such national sovereignty or sanctity. These objectives include farsightedness, responsibility bearing, vigilance, and a previously-studied sense of the risks that plague everyone when sanctity of

the homeland is violated. What is worse is to practice fragmentation and dispute even in situations where disagreement is a kind of underestimation of the historical responsibility for the nation, if not a form of treason for our children, offspring, and future generations. For me, such situations are those in which it is necessary to unite, to be of one rank, to agree on one plan to deal with such an urgent situation and to confront an enemy that entered the country and wreaked havoc on its territories.

The second calamity is that this national rift, as might be described, necessarily requires an exceptional Islamic legal or jurisprudent authentic reference, which each faction brings from our heritage to support and justify its own approach. In such case, it is not strange that some factions resort to our remote, and near, heritage to legalize a kind of emergency jurisprudence of Jihad, which appeared in a particular environment, to address some urgent situations, when Muslims faced a colonial enemy that occupied the land of the Muslims by force. In this case, it is incumbent on every Muslim, man or woman—to face, rebel against and defeat this occupying force.

In such contexts or circumstances, it is natural and logical to issue some judgments and legal opinions for *Jihad* and fighting to address these urgent situations. Such legal opinions are exclusively connected with such contexts or circumstances and must not go beyond the age in which they were issued, nor be applied to other different ages, characterized with peace, stability, and international peace treaties that require a jurisprudence of peace and security and necessitate peaceful treatment with others and the implementation of international instruments.

The Glorious Qur'ān and the honorable *Sunnah* give a unique and high appreciation, unprecedented in other religions, to reason. It is not acceptable, then, in the Islamic *Sharia* that some Arabs and Muslims cite the old *jihad* jurisprudence against the Mongols, the Tatars, and the Crusaders or against the British colonialists in India and implement this context-bound jurisprudence to resolve their disagreements and disputes. Such jurisprudence and its rulings have no place now, since they are out of their

circumstantial context. Once circumstances end, their respective jurisprudence and rulings must end too; otherwise, Muslim societies naturally turn into chaotic and disorderly, as it is happening now.

We have learned at Al-Azhar a jurisprudent rule that confirms the connection of a ruling to the existence of its respective contexts or circumstances. It is unanimously agreed that when certain circumstances do not exist, their ruling has no place to be issued or implemented. The context that no longer exists was one of confronting and rebelling against a disbelieving colonial enemy whose objective was to wipe out Islam and the Muslims. The respective ruling that was connected to this context was fighting to defend the faith, the land, and the nation. This ruling has no place now, due to the fact that its contexts or circumstances did not continue to exist.

This crisis of misunderstanding and false analogy or theorization is the calamity responsible for shedding Muslim blood in dozens and hundreds every day. The issue to bulk large at this calamity is to find a religious cover to justify describing a dissenter as a disbeliever to use this as a pretext to kill him later.

The research papers that I introduce here are closely linked to the theme of terrorism, which is the calamity, the scourge, and the expansive cancer of the age. They address and debunk the misconceptions and fabrications of terrorism, which extremists and *takfirists* produced and used in order to defame Islam and the Muslim history.

Al-Azhar prioritizes the issue of addressing this danger of terrorism that was falsely and unfairly associated with Islam and the Muslims. To positively deal with this issue, Al-Azhar, *inter alia*, holds conferences, pays frequent visits to major religious institutions in Europe and elsewhere, acquaints its pre-university students with the facts and ideas of the armed groups that kill people in the name of Islam, and tracks, analyzes and refutes extremist and terroristic ideologies at Al-Azhar Observatory. The Observatory responds to these ideas in nine languages and sends

peace convoys in collaboration with the Muslim Council of Elders (MCE).

I state here that Al-Azhar does its best in order to implement its mission of undermining the terroristic ideology, exposing its errors and misconceptions. Nevertheless, Al-Azhar assures that the intellectual deviation and its sudden development are not the sole cause of the emergence of these armed groups. It is paradoxical and bewildering that such a group has these potentials and, in the blink of an eye, has obtained such massive military, financial, and combat capabilities that enabled it to extend its influence over vast areas of Mesopotamia and Levant. Such paradox will remain a mystery, but the forthcoming days may reveal its secrets in order for us to know its outer and inner face.

Distinguished readers,
You are about to be left now with some specialized scholars and their great profound, accurate, and insightful studies which will eventually enable you to realize the absurdity of the terrorist ideology, the fallaciousness of its arguments, and the falsity of its misconceptions. They also affirm that Islam does not know this bloody ideology and that the Muslims abhor and deny terrorism.

Professor Aḥmad At-Tayyeb
The Grand Sheikh of Al-Azhar and President of the Muslim Council of Elders

Written at Al-Azhar Sheikhdom
Rabieʿ ul-ʾĀkhar 1438 AH (January 23, 2017 CE)

The Speech of H.E. the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar at the Second Meeting of the Muslim Council of Elders (MCE) and the World Council of Churches (WCC)

In the Name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful

Praise be to Allah. May Allah's peace and blessings be upon our Master, Prophet Muḥammad and upon his Family, Companions, and those who follow in his footsteps until the Last Day.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As-Salamu ‘Alaykum wa Raḥmat Allahi wa Barakatuh
(Peace be upon you)

We are pleased to welcome you to the prestigious institution of Al-Azhar at the kind invitation of the Muslim Council of Elders (MCE). We welcome the dear guests and honorable delegation of the World Council of Churches (WWC), representing all Christian denominations worldwide. Our thanks especially go to Rev. Dr. Olav Fykse Tveit, the General-Secretary of the WCC. Since the first moment we met Dr. Olav in Geneva, the MCE felt him a man with a truthful and sincere heart full of good and kindness to the entire humanity, who is determined to help all people enjoy the noblest form of peace and happiness. His lofty personality reflects his deep spiritual peace and clear conscience, which actually embodies the heavenly-revealed messages. This is the core of religious faith and, then, various divine laws and guidance follow, such as doctrines, acts of worship, financial translations, and ethics.

Let me start my word with reminding of the conclusion reached at our first meeting in Geneva last year, held in Oct. 2016 CE. We agreed to “do our utmost in order to overcome all the obstacles that hinder the way to promote peace, justice, and love among the entire humanity in the east and the west alike, and to hold the next meeting—the current one, at Al-Azhar Headquarters in Cairo.” Our frequent bilateral correspondences chose the theme of “The role of religious leaders in activating citizenship and coexistence initiatives.”

I believe that this issue would most likely capture the attention of religious leaders in the oriental Arab and Muslim

world. This is the greatest challenge in the face of calls to terrorism and terroristic postulates, which attempt to lead young people astray east and west and inculcate false notions and wrong conceptions about the idea of "Islamic State" in their minds. They endeavor to restore traditional concepts and terms, e.g. *ahlu dhimma* (clients of Muslim states); *jizyah* (a per capita yearly tax levied by the Muslim state on certain non-Muslim subjects); and *sabiy* (war spoils), all that Muslim jurisprudence and laws have surpassed since the fall of the Ottoman Caliphate in 1924. The past political system of the Islamic caliphate employed some legislative rules in conformity with ancient times concerning the rights of non-Muslims. So, it is logical, pursuant to the Islamic jurisprudence itself—in the aftermath of changing the political system—to change many legislative rules in connection with the relationship with non-Muslims in the Muslim state.

These challenges forcibly attempt to drive contemporary ruling systems in the Muslim states back to some imaginary systems in their mentalities without any link whatsoever between them and the Sharia laws. Indeed, they are completely far from the Sharia and its eternal texts. Here, we have perceived the grave dangers that result from misunderstandings and fake religiosities. This form of misconception confuses the impeccable values of religion recorded in the Glorious Qurʾān and the Sunnah with the reason-based juristic conclusions made under certain pressing circumstances in the past times.

Given the great differences in circumstances, contexts and time constraints, the issue of citizenship becomes the first and foremost issue worthy of the interest and discussion of religious leaders. It constitutes the practical reply to the delusions that have met somewhat material and moral support so much so that those deceived by such delusions thought that working on achieving them is a form of *jihad* in the cause of Allah and a way to restore the golden ages of Muslim glories.

The citizenship system had been changed in the aftermath of Muslim widespread conquests. The Muslim relationship with non-Muslims in the new territories had developed. It was necessary to

define the relation of non-Muslims with a clearly announced "Muslim State." The term *Ahlu Dhimmah* thus appeared. It means that a Christian or a Jewish citizen enjoys the due protection [*dhimma*] guaranteed by Allah and His Messenger in term of their rights and obligations, which are equal to those of Muslim citizens. I have no doubt that citizenship is the best guarantee for the enforcement of the juristic maxim governing the relations with non-Muslims: *“They have rights and duties equal to our rights and duties*.” To use the modern expressions, all citizens are all completely and absolutely equal in their rights and duties.

It pleases me to say that Al-Azhar, in cooperation with the MCE held a conference last February entitled, “*Freedom and Citizenship: Diversity and Integration*.” It declared, for the first time in our modern history, that citizenship is a purely Islamic system applied by the Prophet (pbuh) in the first Muslim state, the State of Medina. When it comes to the west, this call may—I hope I am wrong—lose much of its brilliance, because citizenship is no longer a challenge to these actively citizenship-based communities in which citizenship and equality of rights and duties are already in force.

Perhaps, the most persistent challenge is to fight the phenomenon of *Islamophobia*. It is a very dangerous phenomenon, if left rolling like a ball of snow without decisive explanations about the facts and philosophies of religions and their ultimate goals to achieve human happiness and help human spiritual, mental, and moral progress. I am awfully worried that the phenomenon of *Islamophobia* may someday in the near future turn to be the phenomenon of *religion phobia*.

The world horizons are replete with confusing anti-religion ideas, which deny religions in general and the world's two greatest religions, Christianity and Islam in particular. To the promoters of atheism, Christianity caused the Crusades in the east and the religious wars in the west, whereas Islam, to them, spread terrorism and destruction, bombing the innocent civilians and turning human life into an unbearable misery of terror and fears. For the atheists, there is no way but to remove these two religions

completely from the human life, if humans really desire peace, security and any honorable life. Those atheists do not tell us about the outcomes of wars in which religion had no hand whatsoever, recent or past. Indeed, atheists and deniers of religions initiated many of these wars, whereas religions had no hand whatsoever in them. Review the victims of social dogmas of modern times to see what the numbers can tell us. Victims of religions throughout ages, since the ancient times until contemporary ages, are not even one tenth when compared to the millions of victims killed, exiled, or tortured for the sake of false prophecies of atheists that no one of them ever came true. After paying this very heavy toll, all such vicious prophecies remained dead letters, impossible to carry out.[8]

Excuse me for expatiating on this point. I am deeply worried about the future of religion and about delivering the religious message entrusted to clergymen, scholars, and religious guides. We all know the immoral arrangements made in preparation for destroying religion and vitiate its contents. Protected by laws, justified by communities, and promoted by globalization, these fallacies find their way to the minds of young people day after another. All these preliminary steps will finally lead to a fierce conflict between the believers and the atheists.

The current problems among heavenly religions cannot be solved through religious conflicts. Indeed, I think that the first step to solution is to remove tensions among religions. Moreover, we should renounce negative historical legacies whose bad influences should be avoided. It is very deniable to recall them in such a critical timing while anticipating long wars against the fierce enemies of religions, who are savagely ready to devour us all.

For the sake of achieving this lofty goal of communication and mutual understanding among the religious institutions, Al-Azhar sought to meet the leaders of the major religious institutions in Europe at the Vatican, London, Geneva, Florence, Paris and

---

[8] See Al-‘Aqqād, *Ash-Shuyu‘iyyah wal ’Insaniyyah* (Communism and Humanity), p. 15, adapted.

Berlin. Moreover, it dispatched peace-delegations to many capitals worldwide in Asia, Europe, Africa, and America.

Gentlemen,
We are here at Al-Azhar working day and night for our Christian brothers and citizens in Egypt. You may contemplate the ‘‘Egyptian Family House’’ here at the heart of the Headquarter (*Mashyakhat*) of Al-Azhar. You may also read Al-Azhar Declaration on Citizenship and Coexistence, which presents citizenship as an alternative to the term ‘‘Minority/Minorities,” which Al-Azhar renounces categorically. These are two urgent and practical steps taken on the ground to be followed by more steps in the future.

Dear brothers,

Do not believe the lies of the media, which associate terrorism with Islam and accuse Muslims of persecuting their fellow Christian citizens. Some liars even said that Islam and Al-Azhar, as falsely alleged in their latest flagrant lies, are behind the last two terrorist bombings. Such lies no longer deceive any person with sound mind who can correctly read events and what is behind them.

I do not want to waste your valuable time in raising evidence against this open falsehood. I would only like to draw your attention to a well-proven current, yet inescapable fact, that terrorism kills more Muslims than Christians. This evidence is decisive and is not open for sophistry and fallacies. Review statistics and monitoring centers and compare the numbers of Muslim victims and Christian victims in Iraq, Syria, and Egypt in particular. You will certainly know that terrorism has no religion or homeland. As a blood thirsty entity, it does not matter for it whether the victims are Muslims, Christians, or atheists. Its goal is to destabilize nations. The target place may be a mosque, a church, a market, or any gathering of peaceful innocent people.

Finally, Al-Azhar is looking forward to the WCC's adoption of Geneva's Call to address the phenomenon of Islamophobia and to the continuity of its appreciated steps on the way of Christian-

Muslim dialogue, which was officially commenced in 1982 between the WCC and the Islamic Conference in Colombo, the Capital of Sri Lanka. I once again welcome you and wish you a fruitful stay in Egypt. Thank you for your visit which is dear to the hearts of all the Egyptians, men and women alike.

Thank you very much for your attentive listening!

As-Salamu ʿAlaykum wa Raḩmatu Allahi wa Barakatuh

(Peace be upon you)

Aḩmad At-Tayyeb
The Grand Sheikh of Al-Azhar

Mashyakhat Al-Azhar
Rajab 1438 AH (April 2017 CE)

The Opening Speech of His Eminence the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar at the conference on

"Freedom, Citizenship, Diversity, and Integration"

Grand Imam's Speech at the Conference titled, "Freedom, Citizenship, Diversity, and Integration"

- It is both sad and painful to show religion as a weapon for killing innocent people.
- The groups deviating from the correct religious approach mobilize the whole world against Islam.
- Any fair-minded person who thinks deeply of the phenomenon of Islamophobia will inevitably realize that it is based on a world double-standard policy against Islam on the one hand, and Christianity and Judaism on the other.
- If the religious institutions in the East and the West fail to stand together against *Islamophobia*, it will target both Christianity and Judaism sooner or later.
- Denying any connections between religions and terrorism is no longer enough and we have to develop practical guidelines based on the religious teachings and ethics to address the current crises.

In the Name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful

May Allah's Peace and Blessing be upon you!

Your Eminence,
Distinguished fellow panel members,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

In the name of Al-Azhar Al-Sharif and the Muslim Council of Elders (MCE), I would like to welcome you to Egypt. All of Egypt welcome you and feels the utmost pleasure for hosting such an important conference. This conference comes under exceptional circumstances and at a difficult time not only for our region, but also for the whole world. This is especially true amid the wars that have broken out in the Arab and Muslim world without any reasonable causes acceptable for humankind in the 21st century.

It is appalling and equally sad and painful that religion is depicted in such miserable circumstances to be the main reason

behind these wars. It is being depicted to people that religion was the key motive behind the terrorist attacks perpetrated against the World Trade Center, the Bataclan theater, the subway stations, and the killing of innocent lives in Niece city and other many cities in the East and the West. We feel very sorry for such terrifying scenes of terrorist attacks that are taking place on an increasing scale. It hurts us more that along with such growing wave of terrorism, extremism is growing while any sound understanding of the reality of divine religions or wisdom behind the prophet's missions is diminishing. Moreover, there is a big conflict between this sound understanding of religions and the falsified interpretations that undermine the correct religious practices and make the sacred texts a tool misused by a few number of criminals. Indeed, religious texts have turned away to be like a gun hired by whoever offers the highest price among arms dealers, war brokers, and theorists of new colonialism.

If you contemplate the condition of such misled groups that have deviated from the right path of religion, you will notice that whenever they try to come together under the banner of Islam, they start to accuse each other of treachery and disbelief. That leads you to realize that they have nothing to do with religion and that they just exploit the name of Islam to involve it in such bloodshed under contradictory pretexts.

Another fact that can help us identify the falsehood of such bloody calls is that those extremists are not really concerned with correcting the religion which they claim to have been deformed, out of their so-claimed intellectual renewal and legal reasoning. It is rather thirst for bloodshed, killing innocent people, and destroying human achievements that they are after, once they have an opportunity to do that.

Until very recently, such misguided extremist groups were too weak and few to cause any danger or harm to the image of the Muslims. However, today they have become very close to mobilizing the whole world against our righteous religion. We can take as one example the phenomenon of Islamophobia in the

northern and southern states in the West. The Muslim people are suffering from the consequences of such a phenomenon.

We are not here today to investigate the phenomenon of Islamophobia, or terrorism that feeds it and promotes the feelings of hatred and enmity against Islam and the Muslim. It is not our question now to find whether terrorism is a local or international strategy, plotted maliciously against the Muslims with support from those who pretend to be defending the human rights. An equal malicious support is generously provided by those who claim to be catering for the global peace, coexistence, liberty, equality, and the other claims stated in the international covenants that we very well remember.

I believe that investigating such issues should be our primary concern for which forums should be organized and religious men, intellectuals, and the free people in our world should seek to reveal to the whole world. In so doing, they will identify those responsible for the nonstop bloodshed and people killed every minute to please those who sponsor such claims.

The fair-minded person who looks at the phenomenon of Islamophobia will easily realize the illogical paradox and the double-standard policy on the part of the international community towards Islam on the one hand and towards Christianity and Judaism on the other. This is the *status quo*, albeit all the three religions face the same accusation of being the source of religious violence and terrorism. The West never cared for the waves of Christian and Jewish fanaticism without making any objection to their practices. However, when it comes to Islam, the West has done everything to hold it accountable while leveling endless accusations against it and thus marring its image.

Yes, the most terrible violent acts in the history of Christianity and Judaism were easily tolerated by the West where religion was said to have nothing to do with terrorism. Examples of such violent acts include the bombings carried out by Michael Bray of Women's health clinics, the bomb attack that targeted Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma city by Timothy McVeigh, and the hate speech by David Koresh and the subsequent violent

acts in Texas, not to mention the religious conflicts in Northern Ireland and the fact that many religious institutions were involved in raping and killing more than two hundred and fifty thousand Muslims in Bosnia.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Allah knows that I do not mean by such lengthy introduction to call to the memories the painful scenes of such terrorist acts or to promote conflict among the human beings. This has never been the message of Divine religions, Al-Azhar Al-Sharif, the East, known for its tolerance, or the civilized West. However, I just want to say that if the religious institutions in the East and the West fail to stand together against Islamophobia, it will target both Christianity and Judaism sooner or later. We will regret it at a time when regret will be of no avail. The common saying, "what goes around comes around" will then prove very true. Indeed, the world has witnessed a rise in the number of the conspirers against religion, atheists and those who promotes the belief in the death of Allah, the advocates of physicalism who are brought forth by Nazism and communism. On the other hand, there are those who call for the legalization of illicit drugs, the destruction of the fabric of family lifestyle, the application of social sex system, and the right to abortion. Other groups now encourage carrying out male and female transformation surgeries and seek to replace national identities with globalization to remove any differences between peoples and eliminate their cultures. Thus, they erase their cultural, religious, and historical characteristics to serve their own purposes. Such evil calls are now developing and the EU authorities are being asked to carry them out. Unfortunately, these calls are gaining more strength and their advocates will attack the Divine religions since they depict religion as the sole source of wars. They say that Christianity gave birth to the Crusades and that Islam is now giving rise to terrorism and bloodshed, insisting that the only solution is to totally eliminate religion from the whole world. They are the same people who turn a deaf ear to the deaths caused by civil wars waged by atheists and pro-

globalization fanatics during the second half of the 20th century. Religion had nothing to do with such wars and a pupil in his early school days can prove the fact that the number of the victims of the wars waged in the name of religion since the pre-common era to the present is hardly a tenth of the number of those killed in the wars launched by the advocates of the social schools. Records of history report that millions of innocent lives were killed, tortured, or exiled in response to false prophecies none of which has ever come true.

Great knowledgeable gathering,

I think you agree with me that the mere defense of the Divine religions against the accusations of terrorism is no longer enough in the light of the enormous challenges we have to face. It is time to take a further step by providing practical ethical models from the religions to address such volatile reality. In my opinion, such a step requires making some necessary arrangements, on the top of which is the removal of any suspicions or tensions among the religious leaders. That is because if peace could not be achieved between the religious leaders in the first place, they will never be able to carry it out to the common people. Such a step can be achieved through our getting to know each other and to have cooperation and integration among us. The religion of Islam, which I am proud to adopt as my religion, calls our attention to this fact in the following Qurʾānic verse, memorized by both Muslims and Christians alike, in which Allah Almighty says, "Humankind, surely We have created you of a male and a female, and made you races and tribes so that you may get to know each other. Surely the most honorable among you in the sight of Allah are the most pious; surely Allah is All Knowing, All Cognizant" (Qurʾān, 49:13)

Islam also stresses a very natural human right, namely the right to freedom and living without any pressures, especially in terms of one's belief and religious affiliation; Allah says:

- "There is no compulsion in religion." (Qurʾān, 2:256)

- “Had your Lord so willed, those on earth would have all believed. Would you then compel people in order that they may become believers?” (Qurʾān, 10:99)
- “Your duty [Prophet Muḩammad] is nothing except the proclamation of the Message.” (Qurʾān, 42:48)

Likewise, among the instructions included in Prophet Muḩammad's letter to the people of Yemen is as follows, “Whoever dislikes Islam among the Jews or Christians should not be compelled to abandon his religion.” This is just one example of the many Islamic authentic texts that establish the right to freedom for all people.

As Al-Azhar calls for the adoption of 'citizenship' to replace the concept of 'minority', it does so on the basis of a constitutional principle applied by the Prophet of Islam (pbuh) to the first Muslim community in history, namely the Muslim state of Medina. The Prophet (pbuh) considered all the Muslim, Christians, and Jewish residents in Medina equal citizens in terms of their responsibilities and rights. The Islamic heritage has passed to us this role-model Prophetic document that fully recognizes the constitutional rights in a way that has never been known in the written human history.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I may have taken too much time to deliver my speech. Indeed, your keen attention has tempted me to speak out all the concerns and pains I have written down on this manuscript.

In conclusion, I would like to express my sincerest thanks to H.E. Mr. Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi, President of the Arab Republic of Egypt, for his patronage of this conference, "*Freedom, Citizenship, Diversity, and Integration"*. I highly value his sincere efforts in calling for the promotion of peaceful coexistence, freedom, and citizenship. I also extend my thanks to our honorable guests as well as our brothers and sisters and the organizing committee for the hard work they have done in the preparation of this event. I hope it will meet your expectations and I apologize to our local and international guests for any non-deliberate shortcomings on our part in terms of serving you in the best possible manner.

Al-Azhar Declaration on Citizenship and Coexistence
The Closing Speech

Al-Azhar Declaration on Citizenship and Coexistence

By His Eminence the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar

In the Name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful

In response to the persisting needs which our Arab communities seek to fulfill;
as part of our efforts to overcome the challenges facing religion, society, and beloved countries;
being cognizant of the substantial dangers facing the unique experience of religious diversity of our societies and the progress of civilization;
pursuant to the individual and joint efforts, documents, and, initiatives launched by Al-Azhar as well as other civil and religious institutions in the Arab World over the recent years;
out of the Muslim-Christian common firm will to achieve peaceful coexistence, reject extremism, condemn the violent acts and crimes perpetrated in the name of religion, which has nothing to do with them, and as declared in the final communiqué of "*Al-Azhar's Conference on Countering Extremism and Terrorism"* of 2014 and the subsequent conferences and joint forums,
Al-Azhar Al-Sharif and the Muslim Council of Elders (MCE) have decided to organize this conference titled, "*Freedom, Citizenship, Diversity, and Integration,*" which has received more than 200 participants representing the religious, civil, cultural, and political elites of sixty countries, from both the Arab Nation and the whole world. A great number of Egyptian religious men, politicians, intellectuals, and journalists also attended it.

The conference lasted for two days (28 February–1st March 2017) where lectures and discussions have been held about the issues of citizenship and diversity along with a review of the experiences, challenges, initiatives, and contributions put forward in this regard.

The participants in the conference agreed to issue Al-Azhar Declaration containing the following provisions:

First, the concept of 'citizenship' has its origin in Islam as it was perfectly applied in the constitutional document of Medina and the subsequent covenants and treaties in which Prophet Muḥammad (pbuh) defined the relationships between the Muslim and non-Muslims. The Declaration stresses that citizenship is not just a desirable solution but rather a necessary recalling of the first Islamic application of the fairest system of governance to the first Muslim community in the state of Medina. The Prophet's application of citizenship was totally free of any discrimination against any category of the society at that time. It featured policies based on religious, racial, and social pluralism. Such pluralism could only prosper in an environment of full citizenship and equality under the constitutional document of Medina. The document stated clearly that all the citizens of Medina must be treated equally in terms of their rights and responsibilities that they together constitute one nation, regardless of their different races and religions, and that non-Muslims have the same rights given to Muslims and are required to fulfill the same obligations imposed on Muslims.

Further to this practical model, Muslim and Arab communities have a rich heritage that features the practice of peaceful coexistence within the society on the basis of diversity and mutual recognition.

Since these principles of tolerance and peaceful values are still facing internal and external challenges, Al-Azhar Al-Sharif, the MCE, and the figures of the leading Christian communities have met today to reaffirm the importance of equality between the Muslims and the Christians in terms of the rights and responsibilities defined by the state. Indeed, both the Muslims and the Christians are considered one nation in which both religions are freely practiced, and this goes in line with the provisions stated in the Constitution of Medina ratified by Prophet Muḥammad (pbuh). Therefore, the national responsibilities must be shared by all the members of societies regardless of their religion.

Second, the adoption of citizenship and equality requires the denouncement of any practices that contradict the principle of

citizenships. Such practices, which the Islamic Law totally rejects, are often based on discrimination against either Muslims or Christians and inevitably result in contempt behaviors, marginalization, and double standard policies, not to mention the forced displacement of civilians and the killing of innocent lives, etc. All such practices are totally rejected by Islam, the Divine religions, and the international norms.

The most important factor of strengthening the national unity and the common will is the patriotic, constitutional state established in accordance with the principles of citizenship, equality, and the rule of law. Therefore, excluding the concept of citizenship as a sort of contract between citizens and communities will inevitably lead to the failure of the whole state, its religious institutions, and the political and cultural organizations. As a consequence, the comprehensive development and the march of progress will be impeded and the enemies will find their opportunity to destabilize our countries, steal our wealth, and control our future.

Moreover, turning our back to the concept of citizenship and its requirements will give rise to pro-minority calls and the demands for minority rights. Based on this understanding, we hope, in this Declaration, that the intellectuals and thinkers show awareness of the bad consequences of the excessive use of the term 'minorities'. That is because this term has implications of discrimination and separation under the pretext of protecting minorities' rights. Over the recent years, we have witnessed a rise in the use of the term 'minorities', which we thought had disappeared with the end of the age of colonialism. Now, it is being re-used to promote division between Muslims and Christians, even between Muslims themselves, because it leads to having loyalties and affiliations to external hostile policies.

Third, due to the rise in the wave of extremism, violence and terrorism over the past decade in the name of religion, and the resulting serious repercussions on the followers of other religions in our societies in terms of pressures, intimidation, forced displacement, and kidnapping, both the Muslim and Christian participants in Al-Azhar Conference declare that all the Divine

religions have nothing to do with terrorism in any form. They further strongly denounce it.

The participants ask those who accuse Islam, or any other Divine religion of having any link to terrorism to immediately stop leveling such false accusations that many have taken as true because of such deliberate and non-deliberate mistakes and false statements.

The participants, assembled at this conference, believe that holding Islam accountable for the actions of those who claim to be Muslims will open the door to accuse all the Divine religions of terrorism. This will give an excuse to the pro-Modernity fanatics who claim that religions must be totally eliminated to guarantee stability for human communities.

Fourth, it is the top duty of the state now to protect the citizens' lives, freedom, properties, as well as their right to citizenship and human dignity. The state can never be absolved of such duty for the protection of its people and their rights. However, no other party whatsoever should intervene in the state's efforts towards fulfilling such a duty. History is full of clear examples confirming the fact that the weakness of the state results in the violation of its citizens' rights. The cultural and national elites concerned with the public interest of all the Arab nations share their states' responsibilities towards countering mass violence regardless of its racial, cultural, or social motives.

Since we share the same destiny, we are all required to show solidarity and to work together to preserve our human, social, and religious existence. We share the same grieves and the same interests. Therefore, we have to take a joint action in order to translate our feelings into a positive practice in all the religious, social, cultural, and national aspects of our life.

Fifth, over the recent years, all of us have exerted great efforts for revision, correction, and rehabilitation at both the individual and institutional levels. Indeed, we Muslims and Christians alike are constantly in need of renewal and development of our culture and the practices of our institutions. As part of these efforts, we have enhanced communication between the religious

institutions in the Arab World and the whole globe. We established close ties with the Vatican, Canterbury Cathedral, the World Council of Churches (WCC), etc.

We also look forward to establishing more cooperation among all the religious, cultural, and media institutions in the Arab World to work together in the areas of raising religious guidance, promoting ethical and patriotic values, and developing mutual relationships on the basis of a common understanding between the Arab and the international religious institutions. In so doing, we can achieve the goal of establishing a Muslim-Christian cross-cultural dialogue.

Sixth, Al-Azhar Al-Sharif and the MCE hope that this conference be the start for establishing a renewable partnership or a contract among all the Arab citizens, Muslims and Christians, as well as those who have other religious affiliations, on the basis of the values of common understanding, mutual recognition, citizenship, and freedom. What we aspire for is no longer an optimal choice but rather an indispensable solution to our crises, for the development of our countries, human societies and the generations to come. Indeed, Prophet Muḥammad (pbuh) set a parable of such community partnership by "people who embark on a ship after casting lots. Some of them are on the lower deck and some on the upper one. When those on the lower deck need water, they would pass by those on the upper deck and cause hardship to them. So, the occupants of lower deck suggest, 'If we make a hole in the bottom of the ship, we shall not harm you.'" Commenting on their attitude, the Prophet (pbuh) said, “If the occupants of the upper deck leave them to carry out their plan they will all be drowned. But if they stop them, all of them will remain safe.”

Now, we are in the same boat since we constitute one society; we face serious dangers that threaten our lives, countries, and religions. Therefore, we want to work hard together to save our societies and countries and to correct our relationships with the whole world by virtue of our common will and the fact that we share the same destiny. Only by doing so can we provide any bright future and better life for our children.

All the Muslims and Christians, assembled at this conference, reiterate their brotherliness and their rejection of any attempt to divide them by claiming that Christians are targeted in their homelands. They further confirm that whatever terrorism does, it will never succeed in ending our joint experience of peaceful coexistence or undermining our common will for the protection of our societies as well as the promotion of citizenship, both in theory and practice.

May Allah grant us success in our endeavors. Indeed, Allah Almighty is Sufficient for us, and He is the Best Disposer of affairs.

Peace be upon you all!

The Speech of H.E. the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar at the Global Summit of Women Speakers of Parliament

This summit is far-reaching in its regional and international effects, for it academically analyzes the major challenging realities facing the Arab and Muslim communities.

Terrorism is the summit's most serious challenge, following its exacerbating dangers East and West.

I hope this summit can put an end to the flaming wars instigated by malicious international policies tampering with the unity of nations and peoples and turning them into theatres of destructive wars.

The new imperial policies brought shame to humanity in an age of democracy, freedom, and human rights.

Targeting innocent peaceful worshippers in an Egyptian church left inescapable and unforgettable pains and soreness in the hearts of Muslims in sympathy for their Christian fellows.

The atrocious attack on the Cathedral does not only hurt the Egyptian Christians but it also hurts Muslims all over the world and desecrates the commemoration of the Prophet Muḫammad's Birthday.

Thousands of books, papers, conferences, and seminars explored thoroughly the issue of women, yet it continues to pose originality and novelty as if no mind ever approached it.

Islam has liberated Muslim women and relieved them from the chains and injustices of the past civilizations.

Islam has come to liberate women from the fetters of customs and traditions and help them act effectively in society and bear responsibilities of development and advancement.

Modernity, in its Western concept, is not the optimal example worthy of international and global circulation and promotion.

Excluding religion from acting in society leads human beings to live in the margin of life without any perception of its essence.

Marginalizing the family role in social upbringing creates a destabilized society deprived of balance, and threatens the very future of humankind.

In the Name of Allah, the Gracious, the Merciful

Ladies and Gentlemen

As-Salāmu ʽAlaykum wa Raḥmatu Allahi wa Barakatuh

At the outset, it gives me great pleasure to express my sincere appreciation for Dr. Amal Abdullah Al-Qubaisi, President of the Federal National Council, UAE, as the first female leader of an Arab parliament and the first Arab woman holding this highly significant legislative position. Congratulations are due on her success to host the eleventh summit of the Parliament Female Heads in the dynamically promising energetic state of the UAE, which spares no effort to extend happiness and promote peace for all with dedicated endeavors to enroot the values of good-neighborliness, stability and coexistence.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is no exaggeration to say that your summit is of paramount importance and far-reaching effects on the Middle East and the entire world at large. Not only does it epitomize the world cultures on the land of the UAE, in reflection of a variety of international experts with highly significant weight in predicting the future of nations, but it also analytically addresses some tremendous challenges encountering the Arab and Muslim communities in realities. In this regard, facing the epidemic of terrorism comes as the first priority; the situation is getting worse and worse with increasing dangers in the east and the west. Upon its early rise, many kept silent and paid no due attention to the sources harboring terrorist thoughts as if they would not go beyond their birth land. To their surprise, they went everywhere to impart terror and horror among humankind in all the corners of the world.

The summit is also discussing another challenge which poses no less threat than terrorism. It is the unyielding strategies of modern policies insisting on dividing nations and fragmenting them. Such strategies are resolute in their endeavors to fragment the stable countries and detach them, turning them into tottering maps plagued with religious, sectarian, and racial conflicts and

potential ruinous battlefields. It seems as if our region was decreed to be a profitable market for makers of destructive weapons, following the new imperial strategies and tactics to make it a theatre for conflicts replete with hotbeds of tension and merchants of wars.

It goes beyond the purpose of this speech to explore the causes of these immoral wars of vanity. I am mainly concerned with commenting on the assembly of fifty female leaders who are the heads of world parliaments in the hope that this parliamentary summit, to be followed by other summits, can put an end to these flaming wars. I find no hesitation to describe such wars as shameful to humanity in an age claiming democracy, freedom, human rights, world peace organizations and societal stability. Surely, the news of yesterday's outrage must have come to you. It left many innocent casualties, who were offering their prayers in an Egyptian church, with horribly inescapable and unforgettable pains and soreness in the hearts of the Muslims, together with their Christian fellows. Such an atrocious crime does not only hurt the Egyptian Christians but it also hurts the Muslims all over the world and desecrates the commemoration of the Prophet Muḩammad's Birthday.

Furthermore, the summit faces another special challenge, seemingly restricted to the Arab and Muslim world. However, any elaborate consideration shows its near and distant future consequences as a major concern to the entire humanity. This is the position of women in the current human civilization. I deeply thank those in charge of the summit for the attention they pay to this topical issue. As a researcher in Islam, I know no other issue exhausting more intellectual energies of scholars, thinkers, and researchers— males and females—over the past century as this issue. For example, the Arab and Muslim modern library stores thousands of books, papers, conferences, and seminars on women's issues. They explored them thoroughly and presented varieties of studies and suggestions. However, the topic continues to pose originality and novelty as if no mind ever approached it.

After long and elaborate consideration, I think the issue may be examined from three perspectives:

First: the Islamic Perspective

Indeed, Islam has liberated women and relieved them from the chains and injustices of the past civilizations, which were contemporary to the rise of Islam. Injustices against women prevailed in the Greek civilization with its famous figures "Plato and Aristotle", the Roman civilization and the religions of India, let alone some sacred scriptures blaming woman for the original sin. The pre-Islamic era of ignorance in Arabia was not an exception. They denied women the right to life, education, ownership and inheritance, among many injustices well known to you, of which time limit allows me no chance to remind you. It is enough to say that in this rigid climate suffocating women Islam made its rise and imposed a strict vision of justice to them. Had Islam kept silent at this past time, no one would have ever blamed it for such injustices and humiliation. Simply, the entire world of that time seriously acted against women and against their rights and their human dignity. Yet, Islam went against the mainstream and declared it loudly, "Women, in all equity, have rights similar to men." (Qurʾān, 2:228) "Do not retain those [women] against their will in your attempt to hurt [them]" (Qurʾān, 2:231). Strikingly significant indeed is the last speech of the Prophet Muḥammad (pbuh), which averred, "Women are equal partners of men".

Fourteen centuries ago, Islam absolutely forbade female infanticide and graced women with absolute rights to inheritance, education, choice of husband, independent ownership, and personal surname unaffected by her husband's. Both man and woman shared the same duties and responsibilities. Evidently, these rights allowed women to be a creative element in society, not less—if not better than men. The Prophet Muḥammad (pbuh) has been authentically quoted to have said, "Had I been allowed to give preference to any, I would have preferred women to men." This is not a compliment to the weak or oppressed gender but an

alerting declaration to draw attention to the unique qualities and characteristics of female excellence and their respective superiority to men.

Second: the Customary Perspective

This perspective is more affected by people's customs and traditions than explicit texts and rulings of the Qurʾān and Sunnah. On the contrary, it has to attribute high merits and a significant intellectual, social and human position to women. Such an approach still takes women back to the time preceding the revelation of the Qurʾān. It denies women many rights guaranteed in Islam. It also recalls odd juristic views to keep women in seclusion and isolation in the assumption that they may cope with alienation and isolation. Nevertheless, Islam has only come to liberate women from seclusion and help them act effectively in society and bear responsibilities of development and advancement.

Third: the Western Modernity Perspective

This perspective is firmly associated with a special set of concepts and philosophies which deny many well-established values deeply rooted in the history and beliefs of their own societies. Here, I should eagerly say that I have clear differentiation between modernity with all its potential dangers, and modernization. The latter is just a process of interaction and vigorous update of religious and ethical heritage to gain the best benefit therefrom. By contrast, in its Western concept, modernity is the optimal example worthy of international and global circulation and promotion. Therefore, I am not to underestimate the positive effects of modernity, such as scientific, human, and technological progresses as well as the critique of customs and traditions for which the heavenly-revealed religions came to redress and refine. To sum up, I present the following potential warnings to your consideration as legislative figures and leading intellectuals:

1. Relativity of ethics and exclusion of sacred texts from designing the governing ethical patterns, entirely entrusting the individual, filled with personal interests and lusts, with decision-

making on ethical issues. To my mind, excluding religion from acting in society leads to marginalization of the human life from the true sight of life essence.

2. Marginalization of family role in social upbringing, referring that role to alternative institutions and enterprises to undertake it. Really, this trend creates a merciless society devoid of emotions, social relations and human affiliations. This will sooner or later lead to a destabilized society deprived of psychological balance and social solidarity and empathy, the merits which can only grow within families. Actually, this adversely affects all political, social, and pedagogical systems. I may even venture to claim that this threatens the very future of humankind.

3. The progress achieved in genetic engineering has several potential dangers, a case which forces us to inquire whether modernity is the optimal alternative for a society with faith in the values of motherhood and family, not disregarding the violations committed in the name of religion. Otherwise, we may accept this reality with endeavors to change and renew it in reliance on our different entities and cultures. Simply, the other alternative is nothing but destruction and disastrous catastrophes at both material and moral levels alike. I wish this question, which is pivotal for me, will draw your attention, while aspiring for a new strategy to empower women and create a state of balance between women and men in the various different areas of life.

Thank you for listening.

As-Salāmu 'Alaykum wa Raḩmatu Allahi wa Barakatuh

Professor Aḩmad At-Tayyeb
Grand Sheikh of Al-Azhar
Chairman of the Muslim Council of Elders (MCE)

Four Messages on Peace by His Eminence the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar

On Peace

The talk on peace is too much multifaceted to be fully encompassed. The rising inquiries about peace, its meaning and its relationships to other cognitive disciplines remain endlessly open despite the fact that a special discipline is dedicated to the field of research on peace and war, their causes, their relationship to social, political, and military sciences, etc. Even philosophers still argue about peace. While some of them view the human history as a sheer history of bloodshed, others think that peace is the default rule in the human life, and that wars and violence are exceptions to this rule.

History tells us that humanity did not enjoy long-term or permanent peace, and that it still suffers destructive wars and their bearings. Thus, modern nations of great civilizations, when pressed by need, feel no restriction in inventing an enemy and applying the axe of war to them, with the purpose of maintaining its own cohesion in the face of that imagined enemy. They transfer the battlefield to the lands of that enemy to keep the fight away from their own lands and peoples. This approach assumed by some modern political organizations is undoubtedly a flagrant call for elimination of international peace and stability, encouragement of aggression and transgression of all ethical and humanitarian principles that make peace the minimum right of humans and human community.

In diagnosing the calamities besetting us in the east, I do not draw much on the conspiracy theory according to which Western Anglo-American machinations against the east is the primary cause of our problems in terms of security, economy, health and education. However, the theatre on which these ugly occurrences take place is anarchic and absurd, involving hints at the hidden dark hands that manipulate the strings from behind the scene.

The proofs of reality and the course of events over half a century or more do not only sustain this understanding, but they rather impose it as incumbent on all those interested in international peace issues in general, and Arab and Islamic peace in particular. How can we understand the backwardness of a great

continent, like Africa, with its riches and resources, including gold, oil, etc., and its persistent inability to pursue advancement and progress! How did third world countries, with all their natural wealth and manpower, lag at the nadir in terms of scientific advancement and technological progress!

Regarding peace, I would dare to claim that members of the United Nations who charted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights were not serious enough when they clearly accentuated in its first article the principles of peace and international security, sovereign equality among member states, prohibition of the use of force or mere threatening to resort to it in the international relations, and the full refrainment from interfering in the internal affairs of countries. They were not serious in acting upon the declaration which they claimed to have been charted for the benefit of humanity and for protecting the rights of states, with no discrimination between eastern or western peoples. No wonder then that an organization, like the United Nation, played no role at all in putting an end to many unfair and oppressive policies. Although sixty-six years have passed since the foundation of the United Nations to encounter global threats to peace, stop hostilities among countries, and to spread stability and peace among nations and countries, the super powers still grant peace to certain nations and deprive others of it according to their own interests, to the system of domination, and even to the unjust approach which they immorally justify according to the principle “the ends justify the means”. I may not be departing from the truth if I say that the UN statutes and charters, and its major institutions do not allow dissemination of peace on the grounds of values of justice, fairness and respect for people’s rights. Whatever it grants by one hand, of global peace and collective security, it soon plunders by the other hand through stipulating consensus among its five permanent Security Council members regarding the Council’s resolutions, namely the resolutions related to the use of military force in the areas of local and international conflicts.

I do not need to prove that these violations or deficiencies in the statute regarding the concept of the world peace in the United

Nations were the direct reasons behind the breakout of wars in the areas that had nothing to do with such wars.

One of the most dangerous factors that demolish world peace is the so-called right to "Veto", and the excessive use of it, especially by the two major poles (the United States and Russia). This alleged right is the one which ties the hands of this organization, preventing it from chasing criminals or administering fair peace in many areas stricken with global tension. Hence, many critics argued that the American vetoes with regard to the Palestinian/Israeli conflict is the key reason behind international terrorism, encouragement of it, and even participation in it one way or another. However, the statements issued by owners of such power of veto describe the victims of terrorism themselves as the primary terrorists.

These international institutions have been originally established only for enforcing the principle of peace, justice and collective security, especially the legacy of the two world wars, of death toll, destruction, devastation and loss of property. However, they were not the lifeline for humanity against what ambuscades them now from involvement in battles, making them return to backward to distant past of primitiveness, and lose all their achievements, advancement and progress.

Here, a comparison attracts me, like many others, between the International Charter announced by the Prophet of Islam, Muḩammad (pbuh) in his sermon during the Farewell Pilgrimage, in which he decided the rights of peace, justice and equality, and the Charter of the United Nations regarding these rights. I also wonder how the Charter of the Prophet has fully achieved its objectives in spreading international peace, while the declaration of the United Nations failed to establish an international umbrella that guarantees justice to the oppressed in face of their oppressors, be they members in the organization or not. For me, the reason is that the Prophet of Islam (pbuh) was honest in his call for the dissemination of peace, justice and equality among people, and that he was not working for the Arabs or the Muslims only. He would rather commence his statements with an address to the

entire humanity: "O people", and would say, "It is incumbent on those who are present to inform those who are absent". He even promised the attendants that the umbrella of peace and security would extend to the countries and people in the Arab region within a short time, "By Allah, Allah will bring this matter to its consummation until a rider travels from Sanʿa to Ḥadhramaut, fearing none except Allah, and the wolf's danger to his sheep. Just do not be in too much of a hurry".

Members of international organizations who have taken upon themselves to spread peace in the world were even maintaining discrimination between the West and the East, and between the right of Westerners to security and peace, and the rights of other people. Why are conflicts scorching only in the East? Why is the West conflict-free, while the reasons behind clashes and strife are fully provoked in East—in Africa and the Muslim countries in particular! We know for sure that the arms industry in the West is ceaselessly thriving. If the use of such weapons against Westerners is forbidden, where are these weapons expected to be used? And who would it be aimed at other than the Easterners!

The worst thing about the philosophy of peace is that it be related to the purposes and fluctuating moods of international politics, to the abandonment of ethics as well as to its fixed objectives. Here, the line of demarcation is blurred between the perspective of Divine messages regarding the concept of peace and its maximal objective as a basic condition for progress, advancement and civilization, and that which is based on political temperaments in their volatility, contradiction and injustice.

Peace is inevitable in Islam, not only for the humans, but also for animals, plants and inanimate objects. The necessity of peace for humanity in Islam derives from equality among all people in terms of rights and duties. The first of these rights is the right of difference. Allah has created people as different: “If your Lord had so willed, He would indeed have made humankind one nation, but they will not cease differing (among themselves)." (Qur'ān, 11: 118) If difference is an irreversible Divine will in the creation of people, then the relationship between different people, as decided

in Islam, is one of knowing one another, meeting and cooperating in righteousness and piety. Hence, peace is the absolute consequence of the relationship of knowing one another and its primary exigency.

Islam views peace as the foundation of international relationships and the relationship between peoples, and views wars as an exception to the rule. Muslims resort to it only when defending themselves, their lands and their beliefs against open aggression. That which applies to the cases of war also applies to the cases of necessity in Islam. It is a well-known juristic rule that necessities are assessed proportionately. Hence, Islam forbids exceeding the limits and transgression in fighting: "Fight in the way of Allah the ones who fight you, but do not transgress; surely Allah does not love the transgressors. Then, kill them wherever you catch them, and drive them out from where they had driven you out. Temptation is more serious than killing. So, do not fight them at the Inviolable Mosque until they fight you therein. If they fight with you, then kill them. Such is the recompense of the disbelievers." (Qurʾān, 2: 190-191)

We would keep repeating that Islam forbids killing the blind, the crippled, the civilian wage-earners, the farmers and the monks among the enemy army, because those and their likes are disabled and weak. They are not expected to engage in the fight against the Muslims, despite their apostasy and their presence in the enemy camp.

Islam also forbids mutilation of corpses and even the carcasses of mordacious dogs. Moreover, Islam forbids compromising the safety of animals, plants, and the inanimate objects. It forbids Muslims to demolish buildings of the enemies, burn their palms, deluge bees, or kill animals in their territory, except in cases of exigent need for food, given that such license is measured proportionately.

The relationship of Islam to peace is amazing to contemplate. Islam's restrict terms are clear regarding the sanctity of blood. It prescribes severe punishment for those who kill people, warning them of painful punishment and permanent torment in Hellfire:

“He who kills a believer premeditatedly, then his recompense is Hell, eternally abiding therein, and Allah will be angry with him, will curse him, and He has prepared for him a tremendous torment.” (Qurʾān, 4: 93)

There are numerous prophetic traditions that dictate the prohibition of killing people or shedding their blood. Here, we are interested in the Islamic bond between Islam and peace as well as in the cobwebbed structure in which Islam and peace wonderfully blend. Muslims pray five times daily, and in every prayer, they contemplate the word peace and its meanings, reciting it at the middle and in the end section of each prayer through the *tashahhud* formula, "Peace be upon us and upon the righteous servants of Allah". Then they contemplate it a third time when concluding the prayer saying, "Peace be upon you."

Thus, the Islamic legislation obligates every Muslim to save himself and save people through peace at least fifteen times a day. Besides, peace is the greeting initiated by Muslims towards everyone meeting them, whether they know them or not. It is an established greeting at all times day and night. In Islam, there is not a morning greeting, an afternoon greeting, an evening, or a night greeting, but the one round-the-clock greeting is associated with peace in word and meaning. If peace is the key to meetings between Muslims and non-Muslims, then the reply to the greeting would also be associated with peace. Since “peace be upon you” is the greeting, then «peace be upon you too» is the response.

Let us consider how peace in the Islamic legislation represents the movement of the pendulum back and forth every time a Muslim contacts other non-Muslims, either through meeting in person or through correspondences, as if the whole life of the Muslim is originally built on peace as a firm principle. Either in terms of worship or interaction with others, a Muslim breathes peace, day and night because Islam as a religion is in fact synonymous to peace, both being derived from the same Arabic root.

If the Name of Allah in Christianity is «love», then Allah in Islam is «Peace», and it is one of His major names. In Islam, we

are ordered to observe the marvelous Attributes of Allah, like peace, as much as our limited nature allows.

Peace is not only a greeting in worldly life, but a mutual greeting between people even in Paradise: “Their greeting therein is 'Peace.'” (Qurʾān, 10: 10) The Qurʾān calls Heaven “Dar As-Salām (The Abode of Peace)”, which means that peace is the standard of happiness in this life and in the Hereafter. Thus, the word for *peace* and its derivatives are mentioned in the Glorious Qurʾān forty-one times, while the word for *war* is mentioned in the Glorious Qurʾān only three times. The word of *sword* is not at all mentioned in the Glorious Qurʾān. Hence, the civilization of Islam is a civilization of peace, as Islam is a religion of peace, mercy and unity. Neither history nor reality indicates that humanity, under the umbrella of the Muslim civilization, suffered fear, poverty or devastation.

Fortunately, the Muslin Council of Elders (MCE) has perceived the weight of the issue of social peace and security, and the urgent world need for revival of the concept of just peace, for the sake of those suffering due to the absence of such concept over more than half a century. I thus believe it is high time for the MCE, which encompasses such unique elite of scholars and prudent and cultured people, to assume a leading role. It is time for the MCE to take broad and confident steps towards reviving the concept of just peace, and to work on building effective international institutions. This is meant to avoid wars, in favor of other political, diplomatic and dialogic alternatives towards solving international disputes, primarily in relation to the Palestinian issue.

The MCE, which heralds promising horizons, should adopt the rule of engaging in mutual acquaintance which is mentioned in the Glorious Qurʾān, "You, humankind, surely We created you of a male and a female, and made you races and tribes so that you may get mutually acquainted. Surely the most honorable among you with Allah are the most pious; surely Allah is All Knowing, Most Cognizant." The contemporary philosophers in the West find no restriction in introducing the theories of clash of civilizations,

the end of history and creative chaos, all of which are devilish calls for killing and fighting. Yet, we, the protectors of rights, justice and peace, have the right to herald the theory of engaging in mutual acquaintance as an unshakable basis for international relationships in our contemporary world, for the sake of a stable and secure life free of fear, coercion, poverty or destitute!

This MCE should now be more active in promoting peace in communities by launching channels of direct communication between scholars and elders on the one hand, and decision-makers and politicians in the East and the West, on the other. Moreover, it should call for the establishment of the values of peace, security, brotherhood, and love through dialogue, and the education of the youth. The United Nations launches many programs for the purpose of building and maintaining peace. These programs promote constructive peace and avoiding disputes and violence.

Last but not least, the MCE should immediately take a step towards urging Muslim scholars to openly collaborate, away from petty biases and ideologies which have been the causes of retardation, disintegration and humiliation of our Arab and Muslim peoples. It is through scholars that the hope in guiding people to the values of right, goodness and beauty can be nourished. This can only be achieved when such scholars maintain peace and concordance amongst themselves in the first place!

In Pursuit of Peace

By H.E. Professor Aḩmad At-Tayyeb,
The Grand Imam of Al-Azhar and Chairman of the Muslim Council of Elders (MCE)

In the Name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful

Prayer is an Islamic fundamental ritual practice revealing human submission and humility to Allah and inculcating peace in the depths of the worshipers' hearts as an hourly reminder of peace. This meaning is not limited to prayers in Islam. Indeed, it is a general feature of all Heavenly-revealed religions. Prayer is the basic article of faith in all Divine messages of the Prophets and Messengers. We learn this guidance from the texts of the Qur᾿ān, which assert two important points :

First, prayer is a common pillar in all the Heavenly revealed religions.

Second, it is firmly associated with human peace; when it exists, peace follows and vice versa.

The fact that prayer is a pillar of faith is made plain in several Qur᾿ānic contexts in which prayer and faith are concomitant. The Qur᾿ān even uses the word *'īmān* [faith] and the word *ṣalāh* [prayer] interchangeably in an indication that prayer is faith and faith is prayer. For example, Allah says, "In no way will Allah indeed waste your belief." (i.e. your prayer) (Qur᾿ān, 2: 143) Prayer is the only way to human happiness in this life and in the life to come. As such, a civilization whose vision and prospects are devoid of the philosophy of prayer experiences a case of unrest with dangerous negative effects on its people and the people of other civilizations as well.

In this context, we understand from the Qur᾿ān that all the Prophets conveyed the message of prayer to humankind in order to save them from idolatry and diabolic aberration. This understanding is evident in the attitude of Abraham—Father of the Prophets. After completing the building of the *Ka'bah*, he poised

all his fears and worries and implored Allah to make that land safe and safeguard his future offspring from idolatry. Abraham is very clear in the intentions behind bringing his family and progeny to such a deserted place; he only wanted them to perform prayers around the House of Allah. As such, he besought Allah to help him keep prayers regularly and guide his descendants from the children of Ishmael and Isaac to keep prayers in all places and times. The Qurʾān records the account of Abraham as follows: “Mention when Abraham said, 'Lord! Make this land secure, and make me and my children avoid the worship of idols. Lord! Surely, they have led many people into error. So, whoever follows me, then surely he is of me; but whoever disobeys me, then surely You are All Forgiving, Most Merciful. Our Lord, surely I have made (some) of my offspring to dwell in an uncultivated valley by Your Inviolable Home, our Lord, so that they may keep up the prayer. So make hearts of humankind yearn towards them and provide them with products, so that possibly they may thank (You). Our Lord, surely You know whatever we conceal and whatever we make public; and in no way is anything whatsoever concealed from Allah in the earth or in the heaven. Praise be to Allah, Who has bestowed upon me with Ishmael and Isaac at an old age. Surely, my Lord is All Hearing of invocation. Lord! Make me one who keeps up the prayer and of my offspring (ones who keep up the prayer), our Lord, and graciously accept my invocation.” (Qurʾān, 14: 35-40)

Abraham’s supplications to Allah directly help us understand the necessity of prayers to achieve security and peace. His major concern was to achieve peace through prayers and to avoid idol worshipping. As far as the philosophy of religion is concerned, peace only comes true when two indivisible elements are fulfilled: devoting prayers to Allah and rejecting the worship of idols. In Surat Al-ʾAnbiyāʾ (the Prophets, no. 21), Allah commends the way of Abrahams, Lot, Isaac and Jacob and describes them as the Imams and leading guides of humankind. Allah inspired them to do good deeds and keep up the prayers: “We made them Imams (i.e., leaders) guiding by Our Command, and We revealed to them

[the necessity of] doing charitable deeds, keeping up the prayers, and the payment of poor-dues. They were worshipers of Us [alone].” (Qurʾān, 21: 73)

Moreover, despite his old age and barren wife, Prophet Zachariah asked Allah in his prayers to grant him good children. In response, the Angels gave him good tidings of John when he was upright offering his prayers in his Chamber. It is indicative that prayers may make the most unlikely matter possible: "So, the angels called out to him as he was upright praying in the Chamber: "Allah gives you the good tidings of John, sincerely confirming a Word from Allah, a master, a chaste, and a Prophet of the righteous.” (Qurʾān, 3: 39)

The importance of Prayers comes next to the proscription of polytheism in Luqman's recommendations to his son: "My son, keep up the prayer, command beneficence, forbid malfeasance, and endure patiently whatever may afflict you. Surely, that is [an indication] of true resolve concerning matters.” (Qurʾān, 31: 17) When Allah chose Moses to deliver His Message to people, prayer was the second Divine Command given to Moses next only to the Command of the worship of Allah: "I have indeed chosen you; so listen to whatever is revealed. Surely I am Allah; there is no Allah except I. So, worship Me, and keep up the prayer for My Remembrance.” (Qurʾān, 20: 13-14)

Even the first miracle of Jesus stressed the importance of prayers in the human life. The words of Jesus in his cradle were as follows. “He [Jesus] said, 'Indeed, I am a servant of Allah. He has given me the Scripture and made me a Prophet. He has made me blessed wherever I am and enjoined prayer and *zakah* upon me, as long as I remain alive. He made me kind to my mother, and He has not made me a wretched tyrant. Peace is with me the day I was born, the day I will die and the day I will be raised back to life.” (Qurʾān, 19: 30-33)

In this context, the revelation to Prophet Muḥammad was not an exception—a reaffirmation of the prayers that followed the same example of the previous Prophets and Messengers. Prayer in Islam is inseparable from faith; none of them can stand without the

other! As such, it is said that no faith exists in those who do not pray.

In conclusion, the 93 Qurʾānic verses that mention prayers confirm that they are the best manifestation of the unity of religions and the integration of the Prophets' messages as well as the unity of the Heavenly-revealed Scriptures. In other words, Allah's address to humanity, since their early time until the Last day, is the same regarding prayers as the cornerstone of the Divine religion.

The second issue is concerned with the association of human peace with prayers; when they exist, peace follows and vice versa. The Islamic philosophy regards prayers as a regular training for the human beings to learn forgiveness, tolerance, and transcendence. It is the parable of a citizen with two worlds—one narrow and suffocating and the other world vast and refreshing. A man lives physically in the material world fraught with conflicting interests and ambitions. However, man can live spiritually and emotionally in an entirely different superior world, free from conflicting purposes and interests.

Like a school, prayer teaches the Muslim how to get rid of brutal instincts that feed evil desires, such as aggression, combat, and exclusion of the other. As such, a Muslim gets physical peace and tranquility, as well as intellectual and emotional transcendence. All people, whether simple minded or highly educated, equally avail of this transcendence. This is due to the fact that they both tend to have fierce and brutal desires. It was proved that the scientific and cultural advancement could not discipline humans or save them from the beast that dwells inside. Only the right religious education can make this transition, which is essential for the human life. We should take the lesson from the events of our current civilization. Peoples and countries suffer from a systematic destruction and unethical extermination of humans, animals, inanimate objects and plants in full view of other nations and states of the East and the West boasting of their progress and prosperity. However, they have no pangs of conscience and find no qualm because of that destruction.

As a Muslim, I contemplate for long on the texts that explain the importance of prayers in teaching psychological and inner peace, especially when I meditate the prayer experience in the life of Prophet Muḩammad (pbuh). He says about himself, “My comfort has been made in prayers,” i.e. he finds calmness and tranquility of the heart and mind in prayers. He used to say to Bilal Ibn Rabāḩ—the caller to prayers, “Get up [to call for prayers], Bilal, and give us comfort by prayer".

He even relieved angry souls with observance of prayers; He said, “Anger is an ember in the heart of a human being. So, whoever senses something of it let him cling to the ground (i.e. prayer).” Simply, the worshipers put their foreheads on the ground in obedience and submission to Allah. When a person puts his face, which is the dearest part of the human body, on the ground, he liberates his soul from the feelings of arrogance, anger and vain superiority over others.

I do believe that humanity is in dire need of the Divine guidance and the light of prophecy. I do believe that human salvation from the contemporary diseases, particularly blind deviation from the truth, has no solution in any material or technological advancement. The solution is actually conditional upon the achievement of spiritual and moral progress in which prayers and supplications can save and rescue humankind from destruction.

3. Common Religious Values and World Peace

First of all, we should be aware that the discussion of religion is not that appealing to contemporary human generations who pay but little attention to religious guidance in their moral decisions about what is right/wrong, good/bad, honest/dishonest of practices, actions and judgments. Given the fact that the contemporary human being has won the battle against backwardness and achieved amazing progress in all the areas related to technology and information, he still suffers a clearly painful and enormous spiritual and ethical loss. After turning away from the Divine Guidance, humanity could not find any alternative guide to correct its course and safeguard people from decline and bitter feelings of individualism, egotism, and erosion of moral responsibility. Such a case almost disemboweled the major civilizational and historical revolutions of any beautiful sense. As such, the achieved progress itself almost forms a history of deviations suffocating humanity in the West and the East on equal footing.

This vision of civilization—chosen by the West as a way to human liberation from the chains and fetters of the past—is devoid of the elements of spirituality, especially the human intuition to believe in Allah and in His Prophets and the Last Day. This emptiness has led to tremendous interrelated and complicated human problems. Such a case only disappointed whoever contemplates the spread and expansion of civilizations, leaving them perplexed with worries and fears. Please, do not think that I am a pessimist or that I have any tendency to gloomy views. I know that this majestic hall, with every single of its pieces reflecting an aspect of civilization and progress, has some noble clergymen from the offspring of this civilization. I know them and I know how much they worry about the unknown consequences of the international policies which persist in ignoring religions and their role in establishing the international peace and the values of human brotherhood and love. I am definitely not pessimist, but any honest reading of realities allows no optimism. What reason is there driving a superpower to spend billions of dollars for the

destruction of poor and hopeless nations? It was possible, if any goodwill was guaranteed, to devote 10% of such sums for modernizing these nations and relieving them of the clutches of suppression, ignorance, poverty, and diseases. This is but one of the most recent destructive examples—quite having no qualm about violating the rights of the weak and oppressed nations without the least conscience, symbolically indicative of the wrong practices nurtured by egotism and arrogance within these civilizations.

We once thought that excluding religion from the epistemological and psychological structure of the Western civilization was just a choice made by political convictions for the achievement of welfare and benefits. While making their choice, the policies exercised their sheer right, unrestricted by other civilizations, cultures, or even religions, especially the religions that resorted to desolate corners in places of worship. We also presumed that the irreligious philosophies and their civilizational stereotypes are non-exportable and not marketable to the world nations. Unfortunately, to our surprise, the attempts to impose this culture on other nations by ways of interference with their most special privacies, even by force when they saw it necessary, shocked us. If only the issue had come to this bad end, it might have been easier to tolerate it but they went beyond all limits in their attempts to form some philosophical and political theories, such as the clash of civilizations, globalization, stereotyping of culture, and center/margin theory, among other policies. Indeed this case recalls the ages of colonization, dominance, and genocide of the other.

Contrary to these policies, religions educate that Allah creates human beings free, and thus variant in their beliefs, ideas, feelings, languages, races and colors. If Allah so willed, He would have created them all into one nation. Conversely, He made them into variant nations and willed that they live with variant lifestyles to the end of time. Clearly, the Qurʾān puts it, “They will remain different.” (Qurʾān, 11: 118) The practical conclusion averred that it is beyond the ability of any nation or civilization, no matter how

arrogant, tyrant and powerful it may be, to melt all peoples into one civilization or culture. A civilization undertaking this attempt just acts against the Divine plan and the nature of things. The Qurʾān rightly asserts, “Allah always prevails in His purpose, but most people do not realize it.” (Qurʾān, 12:21) The logic of religions is purely free from hegemony. It affirms that, were civilizations to follow this inauspicious course, the natural result would not be the dominance of a civilization or a culture over another but the fall of the arrogant civilization or the return of humankind to a historically unprecedented state of brutality and chaos.

This quick comparison makes it plain that the logic of religion concerning civilization is radically contrary to the logic of the clash of civilizations or the end of history and to the logic of communal one-class community, whose pillars fell even before their erecting construction was complete. In this respect, religions put greater emphasis on the human intrinsic tendency to religion practiced as a commonly human shared instinct and universal feeling. No nation, ancient or recent, fell short of this feeling. The studies of fossils and myths and the Western comparative religion studies all prove that human inclination to religion is older than the human history in all material civilizations. Indeed, the motif of divinity or deification was not, as Voltaire and Rousseau suggested, “a created idea presented by the maliciously cunning clergymen and priests who found enough fools and simpletons to believe them”.

A religious person is spiritually more qualified to feel empathy and sense the human fraternity as being the foundation of all spiritual values shared by religions. This fact is clearly evident in my faith—Islam—which asserts that all the human beings belong to one father and one mother. Not only does Islam affirm this human origin, but it also stresses the inseparable religious brotherhood between Islam and the other previous Heavenly-revealed religions. The Islamic faith, the Holy Qur'ān and the Prophet emphasize this fact. For example, Islam (which lexically means submission in Arabic) stands as the main issue of the same

Divine religion delivered by all the Prophets and Messengers from Adam to Muḩammad (Allah's Peace and Blessings be upon them all). Similarly, Prophet Muḩammad (pbuh) affirms that “Prophets are paternal brothers.” The paternal brothers share the same father while they have different mothers. In this statement, "father" is symbolic of religion, while mother denotes the various laws brought by Prophets in compatibility with their times and locations. Furthermore, the Qur'ān affirms the guidance and enlightenment of the Torah and the Gospel. See how wonderful the relationship between the contents of Islam and those of previous Divine messages is! The Qur'ānic text declares, “He has legislated for you as religion what He had enjoined on Noah and that which We have revealed to you, and what We had enjoined on Abraham, Moses and Jesus, [saying], ‘Keep up religion and do not be disunited therein.’ Greatly detested to the polytheists is that to which you call them. Allah selects to Himself whoever He wills and guides to Himself whoever turns penitent.” (Qur'ān, 42:13) Since religion is one and its source is one and the same, it is impossible that religions fail to conclude an agreement on several universal principles and guidelines, those standing for the Prophets' inherited light of guidance undertaken by Prophets one after another.

It is not true—as some unmindfully claim— that the points of similarity and likeness between the Qur'ān and other preceding Scriptures indicate the Qur'ānic borrowing from these books. If they observed that the Divine religion was only one, they would realize that these points of similarity form evidence for the same source, translated in the same Divine address regarding the major issues which are constantly the same regardless of time. Contrary to their presumptions, this is not a proof for the discrepancy of these books, or evidence that one of them borrows from the other. We, Muslims, believe that all the Divine messages are in agreement regarding the fundamental issues of monotheism and the basic virtues and ethics. Any difference in this area is even unimaginable. For example, the Qur'ān is not blamed for having the contents of the Ten Commandments (Exodus: 20:1-17) in

various verses. Likewise, the meanings of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, such as happiness, benignity, charity, asceticism, giving glad tidings to those who are poor, kind, merciful, bereft or peacemakers are all stressed in various Qur'ānic contexts.

Actually, the history repeats itself. London hosted the International Conference of Religion in 1936 CE to which the then Grand Sheikh of Al-Azhar Muḥammad Mustafa Al-Maraghi (d. 1364 AH/1945 CE) sent a treatise entitled, "Az-Zamālah Al-ʿĀlamiyyah, i.e. Human Universal Colleagueship." In this treatise, he highlighted the causes of human disunity and differences, paying attention to a very serious source for the international conflicts, i.e. the exploitation of religion and merchandizing it in the markets of politics and conflicts. Sheikh Al-Maraghi believed that materialism has dominated religion and tampered with it. As such, the right beginning shall be the revival of religious colleagueship among the religious leaders themselves, for they are the most qualified to perceive these lofty meanings. They are also the most deserved of humankind to understand that the threat posed to humanity never comes from different religions but rather from atheism and the philosophies that sanctify and worship the matter and, meanwhile, ridicule religion. Sheikh Al-Maraghi suggested a well-defined plan to activate the universal colleagueship program, specifying the following methods and mechanisms for its implementation.

First: A foundation should be established to purify the religious feelings from grudges and hatred through the following procedures:

1. The religious activities of different religions should adopt a human attitude instead of rousing religious conflicts among their followers.
2. Collecting the lofty human values shared by all religions, such as kind treatment and showing lenience to human beings, and promoting them in various languages away from all grounds of discrimination.
3. Purely rational means should be employed to promote these universal meanings in sincere love of the truth without any

reliance on doubtful means in education, as well as encouragement of religious beliefs.

Second: A foundation should be established to enhance the religious feelings of the educated classes with the aim of strengthening the centers of religion to stand before the limited perspectives of scientific research and freethinking. Such enhancement must depend on evidence and avoid delusion and recourse to the despotic spiritual authority. To sum up, the past errors that cost humanity heavily and burdened them badly must be avoided.

This was Al-Azhar's message to the International Conference of Religion held in London seventy years ago. Despite the changes that have occurred, the world is still in dire need of the spirit of this treatise, which testifies to the universality of Al-Azhar. Since its early beginning, Al-Azhar is mainly concerned with humankind as a whole. It responds to all serious calls for the promotion of universal peace based on justice, respect of human rights and equality of all people. In all of its endeavors, Al-Azhar believes that the human prospects aspired by interreligious dialogue conferences never disagree with the universal rules of Islam. Rather, they mostly form some parts of the Islamic higher objectives and goals.

I am tireless to repeat it once and again—as mentioned in my previous talk— that humanity is urgently in need of the light of prophecy. The modern European urbanity has failed to achieve human happiness and left humans prey to the monstrous powers of tyranny, dominance, and double standards. Actually, these powers of falsehood allow no space for fairness and justice. No one would defy this fact but an arrogantly stubborn person. Let us hope that the modern world will seek spiritual purity in the future by coming back to the guidance of Heavens.

Muslim Civilization *vs.* Western Civilization and the Missing World Peace

All praise is due to Allah, and peace and blessings be upon our Master, the Messenger of Allah, and upon his family and companions, and those who follow his guidance. Now, the month of Ramadan is coming to an end, and its sun is about to set, and yet one cannot tell whether one will survive to live in the shadows of its awe and beauty in the coming years or not! Indeed, Ramadan is the month of the Qurʾān, and its initial third is a time for mercy, its middle for forgiveness and its end for deliverance from Hellfire. It also includes a night, which is better than a thousand months, as described in the Glorious Qurʾān, "The Night of Determination (*laylatu l-Qadr*) is better than a thousand months." (97:3) Besides, the Prophet Muḩammad (pbuh) advises us to "seek it during the last ten nights".

Celebrating the Night of Determination is in principle a celebration of the Glorious Qurʾān, the book that has given rise to a splendid Muslim civilization, and that protects it from being assimilated or attacked by other contemporary civilizations. Such civilizations turned away from the guidance of religions and adopted the clash of civilizations and armed struggles as an ideology, a philosophy and a creed. This is accentuated by the famous English poet Rudyard Kipling (d. 1936) in the opening lines of The Ballad of East and West: "Oh, East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall meet". Since then, this statement has governed the Western policies as a principle and rule that qualifies the relationship between the West and the East. The statement, which is more than hundred years old, has been the most distinctive description of the Western culture that rejects the Muslim East and opposes its civilization and heritage.

We would think that the culture of rejecting Islam had become obsolete under the tremendous progress achieved by the West, especially in the field of information technology through which Islam can now be properly viewed and easily acknowledged, given its moderation and human sense. It was

thought that with the Westerners being able to clearly perceive the true Islam, there would remain no ground for their traditional antagonistic stance towards Islam and its civilization. To our surprise, however, the modern policies of the West retained its old path, though under different mottoes, and kept fabricating false claims and lies about Islam. While the motive for colonization in the last two centuries was the ‘white man’s mission of civilizing and refining the barbarous easterners’, the West has introduced a new plea, namely ‘the clash of civilization’, the ‘inevitability of encountering Islam’, ‘the end of history’, ‘creative chaos’ and dissemination of democracy. All these are fallacies and shameful scandals when considered in the light of the Qurʾānic verse that maintains interaction and mutual integration of civilizations as a basis: “Humankind, surely We have created you of a male and a female, and made you races and tribes so that you may get mutually acquainted. Surely, the most honorable among you in the Providence of Allah are the most pious; surely Allah is All Knowing, Most Cognizant.” (Qurʾān, 49: 13) This is also the case when such fallacies are viewed in the light of the Prophetic sayings that accentuate the principle of equality among humankind: “All humans are as equal as the teeth of a comb” and “Humans are the children of Adam, and Allah has created Adam from earth”.

Indeed, the ‘clash of civilizations' theory that governs the philosophy of Western systems is a colonialist theory par excellence. It is carefully designed to justify the ‘inevitable’ clash with Islam, which is a haunting obsession for decision-makers in the West. When it was crystallized in an article published in the United States in 1996, it was quickly adopted by decision-makers, and transformed, along with other claims, into a miserable reality experienced by the Arabs and the Muslims in many of their home countries.

Undoubtedly, the civilization of Islam is far from the polarization or exclusion sustained by some other civilizations. Otherwise, it would have not survived until now. Indeed, it has survived because it is a civilization of peace, moderation, and

tolerance. Hence, the Muslims are moderate, given that such moderation is established in the Qurʾānic verse in which Almighty Allah addresses the Muslims, “Thus, We have made you a middle nation to be witnesses over humankind, and (for) the Messenger to be a witness over you.” (Qurʾān, 2: 143) The nation that witnesses over other nations is a just nation, given that justice is moderation.

Moreover, the Muslim civilization is distinguished with such moderation from other civilizations that opted for either materialism or spirituality. The reason behind Islamic moderation is thus the Glorious Qurʾān through its balanced and fair address to humanity. A human being belongs to two worlds, with the soul belonging to the world of the unseen and the body to the material world. However, the Glorious Qurʾān addresses humanity with answers to questions which fulfill those dual needs.

In this respect, much can be said about moderation in the Qurʾānic discourse in terms of creed, morals, legislation and the balanced vision of major binaries. These include the seen and the unseen, life and afterlife, coercion and volition, the physical and the abstract, religion and the state, man and women, the prohibition of transgression and the obligation of self-defense, as well as other binaries whose scope falls beyond enumeration. Indeed, due to its moderation, the Muslim civilization has gained that which is missing in other civilizations that lacked that very principle. In the Muslim civilization, man is free from all internal contradictions that arise from polarization between the body and the soul, or between the requirements of Divine guidance and those of life and the community. Hence, a Muslim is qualified to overcome the superficial hiatus between worldly life and the afterlife, and to derive from both that which fulfills the ambitions of the body and the yearnings of the soul. In this sense, there is no binary classification, polarization or conflict, but rather integration, mingling and blending that create a consummate vision, a balanced and tranquil sentiment, and a distinctive acknowledgement of the universe and of the Creator of that universe at one and the same time.

Perhaps it is not an arbitrary exaggeration to maintain that those non-Islamic civilizations, which built their conceptions away from the light of the revelation and the Heaven and from conscience and morality, all had nothing other than the philosophy of struggle as a means or a tool to deal with others. For instance, what would be expected from a civilization that fails to combine belief in the physical matter and belief in Allah, acknowledging the first and disbelieving in Allah? Would it conceive perceptions and actions beyond the framework of this suffocating mundane life? Would not lustfulness, utilitarianism or self-love be the sole norm for virtues and vices!

Imagine when countries of great civilizations, with all their political and military institutions governed by such pure materialist logic, need for purposes of economic security to operate arms factories or control sources of wealth beyond its borders. Would such countries hesitate to get what they want, even if this meant swimming in blood baths? Would they refrain from committing heinous crimes? And whence would it maintain such a principle that guards it against committing such ferocities?

The Muslim civilization would not acknowledge conflict as an approach in dealing with other civilizations, or exercise exclusion or destruction of the others or distortion of their identities. The history of Muslim conquests bears witness that the Muslim civilization would offer radical solutions to genuine social problems, liberating the oppressed and the wronged from the shackles enforced on them by the tyrants. This civilization was never known for liberating the vulnerable for the purpose of controlling or enslaving them or for appropriating their wealth. Rather, it is well known among those who are fair, of the non-Muslims, that fight in Islam was never meant to make people change their faiths, or else to impose Islam on the followers of other religions. Besides, the Muslims never preemptively attacked other nations, with whom there were no feuds, or forced them to choose between embracement of Islam or engagement in fight. This truth needs no evidence, being firmly established in history, despite the suspicions raised by ill-intentioned persons. However,

it is worth noting in brief that Islam was never introduced by Muslim conquerors as the only available option. Rather, it was introduced to people as an alternative, with the people having full freedom to either embrace it or maintain their own faiths, and with their full freedom to exercise the rituals of their faiths being maintained.

Had the Glorious Qurʾān or the noble Sunnah referred, even implicitly, to the imposition of faith or occupation of other people's land as the objective behind fight, the victorious Muslims would have not allowed the vanquished people to choose maintaining their faith in return for payment of an insignificant amount of money. However, history tells us that the conquering Muslims would live among the people of the conquered lands with those conquered people maintaining their own faiths, customs and traditions. In other words, the Muslims acknowledged the existence of a different civilization than theirs and chose to communicate with it unreservedly. Such acknowledgement of other civilizations and heavenly faiths is a clear example that the Muslim civilization was never a civilization of exclusion or appropriation.

Such is the impact of moderation that is manifested in Islam's respect for, and acknowledgement of, other religions despite differing with them. This principle was applied by the Muslim civilization towards the countries conquered by the Muslims. The inhabitants of countries, like Egypt for example, were able to retain their Christian faith. This moderate civilization itself was the reason behind the embracement of Islam by people in such countries. Westerners are still attracted to Islam to the extent that the conversion rates to Islam have become a source of disturbance for official authorities in these countries.

Perhaps the people who deny the moderation of Islam do not doubt that the millions of Westerners, in London, Paris, Berlin, Rome, or Washington, who choose Islam as a religion, were not forced to accept it at the edge of the sword. Rather, people embrace Islam despite the sponsored distortion campaigns against

it, which exert every possible effort to make people repulsive of Islam and the Muslims.

Tracing the history of the Muslim civilization's relationship to other civilizations, one would feel awe at the moral and humanitarian impact of the moderation of Islam and the Muslims, who were guarded against the pitfalls suffered by the followers of other civilizations. The case of Andalusia reveals the difference between the moderation and tolerance of the Muslim civilization when the Muslims prevailed there, and the extremism of the Spaniards when they controlled the lands. It is sufficient here to cite one example given by historians about the tolerance of the Muslims in Andalusia. The Muslims fully participated in the ceremonies of the Christian festivals; some Muslim authors even wrote books on non-Muslim festivals. Among those authors were Abu ʿĀmer As-Sulami, Abul-Qasim Al-ʿAzafi, and Ibn Bashkawāl Al-Qurtubi. Even Muslim jurists and philosophers addressed these festivals, like At-Tartushi, Ibn Rushd (Averroes), Al-Wansharisi and others.

Historians trace such participation to the Muslims sense of integration with the Christians under the Muslim rule in Andalusia, and the common practice of marriage between Muslim men and Spaniard women. Those women would celebrate festivals, like Christmas, in the houses of their Muslim husbands. These reports are reliable since they conform to the fact that the Muslims would never prevent the followers of other religions from practicing their religious rituals. Besides, the pact concluded by the Prophet (pbuh) with the Christians of Najrān is the legal proof for such a practice. Indeed, it represents a sublime sense of tolerance that is almost unknown to other than the Prophet of Islam. The pact included the following.

The protection of Allah and the guarantee of Prophet Muḩammad, sent from Allah, extend on Najrān and its neighborhood. Protection is guaranteed for their goods, their people, the practice of their worship, for those of them who are absent or present, their families and their sanctuaries, and all the large and small money in their possession. No bishop will be

moved of his episcopal seat, monk of his monastery, or priest of his cure. No humiliation will weigh on them, or the blood of a revenge former to the treaty.

They will be neither assembled nor taxable with the dime. No troop will press their ground and when one of them claims it, equity will be established among them. They will be neither oppressed nor suppressed.

Reviewing these texts, an objective reader would agree that they surprise both the Muslims and non-Muslims alike due to their unique fairness that emit only from a Muḥammadan spring of Prophethood. The lessons learned and the spiritual experience witnessed during the month of Ramadan dictate, at such a critical moment in the history of our nation, a recollection of our inevitable duties and incumbent objectives. On top of these duties are unity, conscientiousness, and accountability so that we would not lose the gains accrued by the Arab revolutions and uprisings for which sake noble people lost their lives. We believe that they have fallen martyrs and that they are now alive in with their Lord and near Him, well provided.

Dear fellows,

We are not alone in this world. We have friends just as we have enemies. Those enemies eagerly seek to destroy us and squander our resources, and thus drive us back towards the age of ignorance prior to Islam. Let us overcome our whims and realize that our battle is one of survival and resistance in the face of fierce challenges and stormy winds that are about to sweep our countries, history and culture.

One of our neighbor countries has been suffering political disintegration and security deterioration for over two decades. Most of the people there starve to death. Therefore, and through the platform of Al-Azhar Al-Sharif, I call on the Egyptians, Arabs and Muslims to launch an immediate large-scale relief campaign to collect money, food and medicine for the purpose of succoring those suffering fellows in Somalia. In this call, we are drawing on the noble manners established by the Prophet of Islam (pbuh)

through a hadith reported by Al-Bukhari: “With regard to their being merciful and compassionate among themselves and showing love among themselves, the believers resemble one body; if any part of such body is not well, then the whole body shares sleeplessness and fever with it”.

As the month of Ramadan is coming to a close, it is high time to work towards achieving a Muslim civilizational project that encounters challenges, redresses the path of the nation, and responds to the aspirations of its people. I believe that an arrangement of the Muslim house from inside, and at the hands of the Muslims themselves, is the incumbent challenge of the moment, and that it should be encountered despite the pains and perils. This belief is driven by the hopes and yearnings for a renaissance through which our deserved glory, leadership and honor can be revived.

The Speech of H.E. the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar at a conference in Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

"Al-Azhar and the Muslim Unity"

In the Name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful

Al-Azhar and the Muslim Unity[9]

All praise is due to Allah! May Allah's Peace and Blessings be upon the Last Prophet.

Dear scholars and brothers!

As-Salāmu ʿAlaykum wa Raḥmatu Allahi wa Barakatuh

(May Allah's Peace, Mercy and Blessings be upon you)

It is admittedly true that speeches to colleagues and brothers need no lengthy introductions. You know the weak conditions of the Muslims during the last decades. They are getting weaker and weaker partly by Muslims and partly by enemies. You know that this weak status resulted in disunity and disputes. Actually, we see this touchable fact evident in realities. There is certainly nothing new in saying that the first aim of Al-Azhar—as a universal Islamic institute—is to work on making all the Muslims stand united in solidarity with each other, especially in culture and knowledge without exclusion of anyone. This unity is essential to all other forms of union. It is a real power to achieve the indivisible alignment and unfailing integration. Once an Arab poet truly said,

United spears do stand against division,
Yet when separated are easily broken.

Dear brothers,

Al-Azhar is keenly mindful of the Muslim unity since its rise as the fortress of the Sunni doctrines and the central direction of the Muslim students around the world where they receive

[9] Professor At-Tayyeb delivered this speech in a celebration organized by His Eminence Sheikh Saleh Al Al-Sheikh in the presence of the Saudi Council of Senior Scholars and a group of the leading intellectuals and ministers on Jumada Al-Akhirah 10, 1434 AH/April 20, 2013 CE.

knowledge in reliance on the Qurʾān and the Sunnah before anything else. Then, they complete their education following a universal approach highlighting the merits and universality of the Islamic message to the entire humanity. This approach fundamentally relies on the perfect command of Arabic language and literature as a necessary means for right understanding of the Divine Discourse in the Book and the Sunnah. More than 1000 years ago, Al-Azhar began its mission of enlightenment and is still undertaking it despite vicissitudes, opportune or inopportune. Al-Azhar kept the mission of maintaining the Muslim unity, addressing the debatable issues of differences and disputes, mainly sowed by enemies to deceive the simpletons but eventually all the Muslims usually pay expensively for such mistakes.

> “You who have believed, in case you obey a group of the ones who were brought the Scripture, they will turn you back after your belief into disbelievers. How can you disbelieve while the verses of Allah are recited to you, and His Messenger is among you? Whoever firmly adheres to Allah, then he is already guided to a straight Path. You who have believed, be fully mindful of Allah and do not die except as Muslims (in submission). And adhere firmly to the Rope of Allah (i.e. the Qurʾān) altogether, and do not be disunited. Remember the favor of Allah upon you as you were enemies, then He brought your hearts together, so you have become brethren by His favor. You were upon the brink of a hole of Fire, but He rescued you from it. Thus, Allah makes His signs clear to you so that you may be guided. Let there be a community of you call to charity, and command beneficence, and forbid maleficence. Those are the prosperous.” (Qurʾān, 3: 100-104)

Honorable brothers,

Al-Azhar is tirelessly reminding of the fact, forgotten by many, that *Ahlu Sunnati wa l-Jamāʿah* [the Community Unified on Sunnah] is a term referring to the majorities of Muslim peoples who adhere to the guidance of the Book and the Sunnah and hold the Prophet's Companions in reverence. These are the people who

follow the guidance of the early Muslim heritage as unanimously accepted, including the contributions of the Prophet's Companions, their successors and the leading *imams* of the best centuries, such as Abu Ḥanīfah, Mālik, Al-Shāfi‘iy, and Aḩamd (may Allah be pleased with them all). In addition, they follow the leading trustworthy scholars, given their various views and intellectual trends, who creatively revived the knowledge of early authorities and *imams*, such as Abu Mansur Al-Matureedi, Abul-Ḥasan Al-Ash‘ariy, Al-Junayd Al-Baghdādiy, Al-Ḥārith Al-Muḩasabiy, Al-Qushayriy and Al-Ghazali, among many other scholars of *Hadith* and *Fiqh* since the time of Al-Bukhariy and Muslim up to the time of Ibn ‘Aqeel, Ibn Al-Jawziy, Ibn Qudāmah, Ibn Taymiyyah, Ibn Qayyem Al-Jawziyyah, Ibn Daqeeq Al-‘īd, Al-Subki, Ibn Ḥajar, Al-Shatibiy and Al-Suyutiy—may Allah rest their souls in peace. Like stars, they have brilliantly illuminated the Muslim culture, shining in the skies of the Universal Islamic Sharia that flourished in all the corners of the world and blessed humanity with guidance and happiness, regardless of eras and tongues.

Students of knowledge and researchers are well aware that the founding fathers of Ash‘arism usually state in their books that *Ahlu Sunnati wa l-Jama‘ah* is a general title inclusive of the Matureedis, Ash‘arites and scholars of Hadith. Many declared this fact, such as Al-Razi, Al-ʾIsfrāʿīniy in his work *“At-Tabṣeer*” [Enlightenment], Al-Baghdadi in his work “*’Uṣūlu Deen*” [Fundamentals of Faith], Al-ʾĀmidiy in his book “*Abkāru l-Afkār*” [Virgin Ideas]. As such, they were entirely apart from all exclusive, preclusive or restrictive approaches.

Honorable Brothers,

This fact is not just a theoretical framework found in the approved literature of *Ahlu Sunnati wa l-Jamaʿah* but a living practical approach with much evidence in realities. Al-Azhar performance and academic formation of students stand a witness for this spirit. Al-Azhar institution is markedly noted for its well-balanced visions, universally cultural mode, moderate attitude and firm faith in Muslim unity including those who face the same

prayer direction (*Qiblah*). Let me share a personal experience with you. During the sixtieth of the last century, I was a post-graduate student at Al-Azhar. My instructors represented a variety of schools and trends of thought as follows:

- Sheikh Muḩammad Yūsuf, a well-known leading Ash'arite Sheikh;
- Sheikh 'Awaḍallah Hejazi, widely noted for his rational logic aptitude.
- Sheikh 'Abdel Haleem Maḩmoud, famously known for his spiritual attitude.
- Sheikh Muḩammad Khaleel Harrās, well-known for his *Salafism*. He is also the author of the leading doctoral dissertation "*Ibn Taymiyah As-Salafi*y" [Ibn Taymiyah, the Salafist] presented to the Faculty of *'Uṣūl Deen*, al-Azhar University.
- Sheikh 'Abdel Raḩmān Biyṣār and Sheikh Muḩammad Ghallāb, who were noted for their philosophical tendencies.

Allah witnesses that they all were ardent advocates and callers of Islam, using their rich knowledge of different cultures and philosophies to substantiate the truth of the Book and the Sunnah. We learned from them all and never felt upset with their scholastic variances, nor did we suffer any form of intellectual conflict in their presence. Rather, we learned their moderation, objectivity, ardent love and loyalty to the Book and the Sunnah. This is just a practical convincing experience proving that a scholar with varieties of knowledge sources and access to different trends of thoughts, unrestricting himself to one attitude or thinker or even to an entire school of law or theology, will be further away from extremism, bigotry and fanaticism. He grows more moderate and flexible in thinking, which betters decision-making based on the conclusive evidence.

Assuming the presidency of Al-Azhar University, I was keen to translate this fact in the educational curricula of Al-Azhar colleges. I aimed to train students and familiarize them with the texts of the leadings authors from all schools of theology and law, building the spirit of moderation in the hearts and souls and placating inclinations to extremism and narrow-mindedness. When my responsibilities grew heavier—being the servant of Al-Azhar

institution, knowledge and scholars, my foremost priority was to send messages to the Muslim intellectual leaders and scholars, urging them to work hand in hand for Muslim unity, especially the unity of *Ahlu Sunnati wa l-Jamaʿah*, to combat hardline dissenters, extremists, and exclusionists who issue the *fatwas* of excommunication [*takfeer*] and attribute their opponents to heresies. The outcome of such exclusive trends is nothing but more discrepancies, fragmentations, humility, and weakness. Some of those present now may testify to the messages I sent only a few days following the assumption of the leading position in this prestigious Islamic institution.

Responses or reactions to my message were not that encouraging. Some even found no qualm to discourage my endeavors, instead of strengthening it or communicating with me about it. I only aimed to redress the very painful phenomenon I highlighted at the outset of my speech. I kept waiting for echoes. It took me not long to convene some outstanding intellectual figures and imposing missioners representing the wide spectrum of the Muslim schools and trends inside and outside Egypt. In this occasion, Egypt had the honor of hosting some Saudi missioners and scholars. The meeting took place in my office in Cairo on January 25, 2011 CE. Our meeting explored the possible means to achieve the same aim—Muslim unity, beginning with the unity of *Ahlu Sunnati wa l-Jamaʿah* before contacting other Muslims. Brothers who follow different schools also came to mention. However, we agreed not to occupy ourselves with alleged ecumenism but to seek an inevitably mutual understanding imposed by faith, neighborhood and shared interests. Now, with open heart and mind, I address fraternal scholars, intellectuals and missioners repeating my call, which is the call and message of Al-Azhar. My hopes are very great following the long experience we have had about our diseases and antidotes, given the heavy responsibility we share in fighting against this harmful phenomenon until we get rid of it.

Dear brothers,

It is my duty to tell you plainly that the only academic way left to guarantee the formation and survival of the spirit of unity is the moderately open educational approach, free from exclusion,

demonization of opponents and premature judgment. We shall teach our children that *Ahlu Sunnati wa l-Jamaʿah* include the Hanbaliy *Hadith* traditionalists and jurists as well as the Matureediy exegetes and jurists, who follow the Hanafiy school of law, in addition to the Ash‘arite scholars and jurists from various schools, especially the Shafi‘iy and Malikiy schools, who foregather the textual and rational approaches and follow the prophetic tradition and sound reasoning.

As such, *Ahlu Sunnati wa l-Jamaʿah* is not a title restricted to a certain group. It is our duty to develop the comprehensive and well-balanced educational curricula for our children to discover by themselves the unity of the Muslims in thought and in academic and cultural heritage. Our aim is to move from weakness to strength and unity—Allah willing. Most of us call for recognition and respect of the followers of other civilizations and religions who share the same world, replete with conflicting and competing policies, strategies and ideas. Now, why do not we respond to a Muslim dialogue gathering all the Sunnis, who are about 1.5 billion living in all the countries around the world, especially in the two virgin continents of Africa and Asia that are central to human future, as observers assert.

Let us embark on the way of unity armed with determination, forbearance, open-mindedness, and perfect awareness. We shall remain patient, stand in solidary with one another, and exchange advices and ideas in sincere devotion to Allah, His religion, Book and Prophet's Sunnah, then to all the Muslims and eventually to the entire humanity.

I desire no more than to set things right as far as I can. Yet, the achievement of my aim depends on Allah alone. He is enough for us and how excellent a guardian He is! “Do not dispute among yourselves, lest you fail and your power goes wasted!” (Qurʾān, 8:46)

Thanks for your kind listening!

As-Salāmu ʿAlaykum wa Raḥmatu Allahi wa Barakatuh

Professor Aḥmad At-Tayyeb

The Grand Sheikh of Al-Azhar

The Speech of H.E. the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar in the House of Lords

In Britain

Baroness D'Souza, the speaker of the House of Lords,
Respected Ladies and Gentlemen,
Members of the House of Lords,

Peace be upon you all.

Allow me to express to you how delighted I am to be among this distinguished group, the grandsons and granddaughters of the makers of civilization and modernity, the guardians of social justice, the advocates of human rights, freedom of religion, freedom of opinion and creativity.

I have come to speak to you and to listen to you with the hope that our thoughts and opinions meet at a point good for all the people in the West and the East.

Allow me also to speak to you briefly about Al-Azhar whom I represent. Al-Azhar is a scientific and educational institution. Its roots go centuries back as it was founded in 972 CE. It was built to be a mosque for worship and teaching together. This continued from that time and it carries the responsibility to spread the knowledge about this religion [of Islam]. It is also responsible to convey its scientific and spiritual message in a pure form to all people today. In modern ages, Al-Azhar developed to be one of the biggest institutions including the oldest university in the world. This university is composed of seventy one different faculties that spread all over Egypt from Aswan in the south to Alexandria and Damietta at the Mediterranean in the north. More than 300,000 students study the different branches of knowledge in all its faculties including the knowledge of the Islamic Shariʿah, which is taught in specialized Islamic faculties; and the natural sciences which are taught in the faculties of science, medicine, pharmacy, engineering, agriculture and so on. Among these students of Al-Azhar University there are 14,000 overseas students from 110 countries all over the world. There are 10,000 educational institutes before the university level where two million students,

boys and girls, study, many of whom are also overseas students. In addition to this, there is the Islamic Research Academy.

I believe it is important to refer to the fact that the curricula taught to the students at Al-Azhar since childhood until they graduate from university is based on multiple thoughts and different points of view. It involves the study of the different Islamic sects within Shariʿah and Islamic jurisprudence. It is also based on presenting all the opinions that may even contradict each other. As such, the students receive their knowledge at Al-Azhar from the age of ten. They are taught that these different views together are sound and correctly express Islam. This way actually helps the mind of the students of Al-Azhar to accept different opinions. It also makes them liberated from being narrow-minded or sticking to one opinion or doctrine viewed right by one group and wrong by another. This multiple-topic methodology in which students become rooted gives these students open minds and immunity against extremism, exclusion, violence and labeling other disbelievers.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Look at the leaders of terrorism and extremism! Do you find among them a graduate from Al-Azhar? It will be very difficult to find one like this, with the exception of one well known Azharite.

I apologize for this lengthy introduction which, I hope, is enough to put forth the true Islam as faithfully expressed in Al-Azhar. I hope it has managed to prove you the falsity of the news that some of the terrorist and militant movements were born from the womb of Islam, or that the teachings of this religion had made 'ISIS' and other terrorist movements. Neither is it true that Islam is responsible for this black terrorism. Unfortunately, these bad rumors spread widely and were welcomed, ultimately leading to the phenomenon of Islamophobia which has been playing a very bad and serious role in fuelling the clash of civilization between the West and the East.

Let us now agree, my friends, on a principle which we all can refer to. This principle is that it is not fair or acceptable to

judge religions by the acts of some terrorists and criminals who follow these religions. This is for a very simple logical reason that the teachings of religions are the first to condemn these terrorists and their terrorist inhuman crimes. It is a fact that the Muslims have not condemned the Christian or the Jewish religions for what some of their followers committed against the Muslims, including killings, displacements and aggressions, neither in the present nor in the past. Why should Islam then be accounted responsible for the acts of those who behave against its teachings? We say this in spite of the clear condemnation of the Muslims of the crimes of these militant groups in America, Europe and the Arab world and all that they do, including beheading, burning people alive, falsely claiming to do this in the name of Allah and the name of Islam.

The reasons that stop us, ladies and gentlemen, from judging Judaism or Christianity by what is committed by some of their followers against Muslims is that our Islamic faith would never be complete except by believing in these two religions and all the previous heavenly messages. We believe in all the Prophets and Messengers of Allah, like Moses, Jesus and Muḥammad, peace be upon them.

Reading the history of the crusades, I have noted that Muslim historians have avoided calling them crusades. They call them the wars of the foreigners. I have also noticed that the word ‘crusade’ was not included in the modern Arabic literature except when it was translated from European literature.

Heavenly religions, ladies and gentlemen are, first and foremost, nothing but messages of peace to the human beings. I would claim that they all carry a message of peace even to the animals, plants and the environment. We need to know that Islam as a religion does not allow the Muslims to use weapons except in one condition, which is to defend themselves, their properties and countries. It never happened that the Muslims fought others to force them to adopt the religion of Islam. In addition, Islam does not see non-Muslims, Christians or Jews, from the perspective of enmity, tension or violence, but rather from the perspective of human brotherhood and kindness. There are clear verses in the

Qurʾān, which all state that the relationship between the Muslims and those who live peacefully with them, regardless of their religions or sects, is a relationship of love, fairness and righteousness. It is not fair to mention that Islam, revealed to Muḩammad (pbuh) and expressed through the Qurʾān ic texts, is a religion opposed to Christianity and Judaism. Rather, it presents itself as the last link of one Divine religion chain called Submission (Islam), starting with Adam, Abraham, Moses, Jesus and ending with Muḩammad, peace and prayer be upon them all. Moreover, Islam states that the origin of religion is one in all these messages and that is why the Qurʾān mentions the Torah and the Gospel in very respectful words. It recognizes their impact in protecting humanity from going astray. This is why Allah, the Almighty, describes the Torah and the Gospel in the Qurʾān as "guide and light". (Qurʾān, 5:44) He also describes the Qurʾān as a Book that confirms the truth in the scriptures that preceded it, i.e. the Torah and the Gospel. (Qurʾān, 5:48)

Islam is linked to all other heavenly religions with physical links. However, it has a special relationship with the Christians. It is stated in the Qurʾān that they are the nearest people to the Muslims. The relationship between the two religions is friendly and brotherly. Christians as described by Qurʾān are humble people who are not haughty. The followers of Jesus, peace be upon Him, are given compassion and mercy in their hearts by Allah. (Qurʾān, 5:82-3) Many of the Christian clergymen express their joy at what they read in the Qurʾān and the prophetic sayings (Hadith) about Christianity and Christians in general and about Jesus and Mary, peace upon them, in particular.

I think that the messages of religious fraternity communicated by Islam and Christianity are enough to build bridges of continuous understanding and closeness between the Muslims and the Christians in the East and the West. This is particularly the case when the two religions are academically and objectively considered away from the rule of materialism, politics and misinterpreting religion, distorting its teachings and abusing

its sanctity to achieve personal benefits and interests at the expense of universal and moral values.

Ladies and Gentlemen,
Members of the House of Lords,

Unfortunately, the current international situation is dominated by fear from terrorism, expanding in many regions. We have to pay due attention to the fact that if ISIS is expanding now in the Middle East, it will expand in any place in the world in the future unless we have a serious international will to confront this destructive epidemic. We need to be frank in analyzing the reasons which have led to its emergence and its fast expansion so that it would be possible for us to combat this grave danger and eliminate its sources and potentials.

It has become necessary, ladies and gentlemen, that the relation between the East and the West should be one of peace and understanding based on mutual respect for their different doctrines, identities and cultures. Above all, we need to have a sense of global and human brotherhood. You may be surprised to know that the scholars of Al-Azhar have been aware, from the very beginning, to the necessity of this brotherhood. The Grand Imam of Al-Azhar Sheikh Marāghi sent a message to an international conference held here in London on July 3, 1936, in which he reached the conclusion that there was no way for humanity to resolve the international conflicts except by achieving international collegiality between all nations. He presented a detailed program that cannot be elaborated on here due to time limits.

I would like to assure you that Al-Azhar Al-Sharif gives priority at the present time to unveiling the falseness of extreme thoughts and their grave deviation from the Islamic Shariʿah. Al-Azhar held an international conference last December in which all oriental churches and religious and ethnic minorities as well as the Sunni, Shi'ite, and Ibadi scholars were represented. They all made a clear statement (a copy of which will be given to you) which criminalized violence, extremism and blood-shedding. The

statement also stated that heavenly religions are innocent from killing people and infringing on their rights. It also denounced the practices of forced displacement of non-Muslims in Iraq from their areas and called on them to remain in their homes and fight such practices.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We have come here, at an invitation from the Archbishop of Canterbury, full of honest desires to achieve mutual understanding, close co-operation, complete respect for the religious and cultural differences in order to achieve our dream of international peace so that the poor and rich, alike, can enjoy such peace. Do I have the right to have such a dream?

Thank you for listening.

The Speech of H.E. the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar in Indonesia 2016

In the Name of Allah, the Most Compassionate, the Most Merciful

Your Excellency Prof. Dr. Mudjina Raha Radjeo, the Rector of the State Islamic University of Maulana Malik Ibrahim,
Brothers and colleagues,
Professors of the University,
Sons and daughters, the students,

May Allah's peace and blessings be upon you!

It is my pleasure to meet this honorable gathering of professors, researchers and students at the University of Maulana Malik Ibrahim. I can smell the fragrance of scientific research in your land and see the desire for knowledge in your eyes. You have reminded me of my pursuit of knowledge, my journeys to seek knowledge at Al-Azhar University, my happiness to read a text from our heritage or to discover a new idea or guide a researcher to his goal.

This feeling of mine is recognizable to any person who takes teaching as a mission and a message of life. It is the message of Prophets. It is a grace for teachers to hear the saying of the Prophet (pbuh) "I have been sent as a teacher." And this feeling will be valued by those who tasted the beauty of discovering the truth after a long journey of pursuit. Imam Al-Ghazāli used to repeat, "A Sage once was asked, 'what is happiness?' The sage replied, 'It is to reach clear evidence and find out a fallacy of a misconception.'"

When our ancestors used to practice horseback riding, they found it the most interesting activity, but not more than reading!

Knowledge is the best thing to strive for. It is the sough-after objective of the sages and the legacy of the Prophets: “The Prophets did not leave dinars or dirhams (coins or currency) as inheritance; they only left knowledge.” It is a key to paradise: "Allah makes the way to paradise easy for him who treads the path in search of knowledge." It is the shield that protects the nation

from deviation: "Allah does not take away knowledge by snatching it from the people but He takes away knowledge by taking away the scholars, so that when no learned person is left, people turn to the ignorant as their leaders. Then, they are asked to deliver religious verdicts and they deliver them without knowledge. So, they go astray, and lead others astray." (Bukhāriy)

So blessed is this life for those whose rank Allah has elevated: "Allah will raise the ranks of those who have believed among you and those who were given knowledge." (Qurʾān, 58:11)

More than one thousand years ago, Egypt—the only country that stretches between the two continents of Asia and Africa—marked the birthplace of civilizations and the home of the divinely-revealed religions. It was a sublime minaret and beacon of light that disseminated its guiding light all over the world, especially for the Muslim and Arab youth of these two contents.

Thanks to Al-Azhar Al-Sharif, I am standing amongst you today. I deem this recognition granted by our Indonesian brothers to be recognition for Al-Azhar as a whole. As you may know, Al-Azhar is not only an ancient institution or an international university. It rather carries a genuine message and a distinguished intellectual approach.

Indeed, Al-Azhar bears the responsibility for the scientific and missionary aspects of the message of Islam—the message of peace, equality, justice and human dignity. It is also the message of liberation from the restraints that overburden humanity, and the belief in all Allah's Messengers and revealed Scriptures: "The Messenger has believed in what was revealed to him from his Lord, and so have the believers. All of them have believed in Allah, His angels and His Scriptures and His Messengers, [saying], 'We make no distinction between any of His messengers.' They say, "We have heard and obeyed. [We seek] Your forgiveness, our Lord; to You is the [final] destination." (Qurʾān 2:285)

To comprehend this message, teach it and call for it, Al-Azhar follows the Islamic orthodox doctrine as represented in the thought of Abul-Ḥassan Al-ʼAshʽariy, which is reflected in his works which, giving insights into moderate logical thinking. This doctrine is also represented in the moderate views of the leading Muslim scholars, Abu Ḥanīfah, Mālik, Al-Shafiʽiy and Ibn Ḥanbal. Their renowned names are always reiterated within the auditoriums of Al-Azhar, where their opinions and sayings are taught and compared, in order to reach the most outbalancing ones that fulfill the changing needs of the Muslim Nation.

Throughout centuries, Al-Azhar has adopted an approach that is based, first of all, on providing its learners with an excellent command of Arabic, then in studying the Qurʼān and the Sunnah as well as the disciplines that serve them. There are also disciplines that help the students deduce legal, scientific and doctrinal rulings from the Qurʼān and the Sunnah, the Principles of Religion, the Principles of Jurisprudence as well as the disciplines of the Qurʼān , the Hadith, and Comparative Jurisprudence. Meanwhile, the learners are provided with sufficient knowledge of modern sciences, Islamic civilization, and Eastern and Western philosophy. Out of these disciplines, they can obtain useful information to help them understand the past and the present and predict the future as well as qualify them to give verdict in light of the changing circumstances based on scientific methods and approved principles.

If you ask me about the distinctive feature of Al-Azhar's approach, I would say that it is the methodology of accurate, deep and textual analysis of the Arab and the Muslim scholarly heritage, which is the fruit of 14 centuries with the treasures of our culture. This analysis provides one with a command of the Shariʽah disciplines, besides the command of Arabic studies in order to enable our graduates to meet the Muslim Nation's needs. Thus, the graduate can be a qualified Islamic reference in the whole Muslim world.

It was destined for me, thanks to Allah, to enter this ancient institution after a spiritual upbringing at a home of religion and

knowledge. I was educated by a father who granted me many things, may Allah reward him. I was directed by famous scholars of Al-Azhar who acquired the Shariʿah sciences according to the methodology of the early scholars, the Islamic wisdom as established by the Muslim Philosopher Yaʿqoub Al-Kindi and the spiritual order according to the methodology of the following pious Imams: Al-Junaid Al-Baghdādiy, Al-Ḥārith Al-Muḥāsibiy, Abul-Qāsim Al-Qushairiy, and Abu Ḥāmid Al-Ghazāliy. This combination spread in Al-Azhar since the innovator Imam Ibn Daqeeq Al-ʿīd, Shaykh ul-ʾIslām Zakariyya Al-ʾAnṣāriy, Ibn Ḥajar Al-ʿAsqalāniy (the author of *Al-Fatḥ*), Ḥasan Al-ʿAṭṭār, Muḥammad ʿAbdou, Al-Marāghiy, Muṣṭafa ʿAbdel-Raziq, and Sulaimān Dunia – may Allah rest their souls in peace.

These are the principles of the Al-Azhar discourse which is characterized by a fairly balanced course between the followers of the predecessors who avoid *tashbīh* (matching), and *ta'wīl* (interpretation) and the successors who prefer the latter according to the rules of Arabic language and the Shariʿah. This also goes in line with the statement of Imam Mālik who said, "*Al-istiwā'* (leveling) is a known term, but how it is cannot be comprehended, and belief in it is obligatory and asking about it is *bid'ah* (discouraged innovation in religion)." Similarly, we adopt the balanced course that avoids bigotry towards a specific doctrine on the one hand, and ignoring the principles of building argumentations needed to choose the preferred view of the scholars without knowledge, on the other.

Al-Azhar's moderate discourse is welcomed everywhere, inside and outside the Muslim world. This is due to the fact that it combines scientific thinking and mystic spirit. It also adheres to the moderate course of belief and practice that reflects the genuine Islamic spirit prevailing in the Muslim world, regardless of the trivial counter opinions.

I feel extremely happy to attend this great event in Jawa. I have served the noble disciplines of Islamic studies and the new generations in several universities in the Arab and Muslim worlds.

I attend today as a representative of your great Islamic institution of Al-Azhar, with whose leadership I have been entrusted in these difficult circumstances. I trust Allah the Almighty, your determination, sincerity, and enthusiasm for religion, heritage and our tolerant human culture.

I am grateful for your granting me Honorary Doctorate, which I think is an appreciation for the relationship between Al-Azhar of Egypt and the University of Maulana Malik Ibrahim.

Thanks to you all.
May Allah's peace and blessing be upon you!

The Speech of H.E. the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar to the Youth

(1)

The Speech of H.E. the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar at the First International Forum for Muslim and Christian Youth in Cairo, Egypt

In the Name of Allah, the Most Gracious the Most Merciful

Dear all,

I would like to welcome all of you to Egypt and to Al-Azhar Al-Sharif. It gives me great pleasure to see promising Christian and Muslim youths from the East and West have come together to meet here at *Mashyakhat Al-Azhar* in order to discuss the most crucial issue that highly preoccupies the world, i.e. global peace and coexistence between the East and the West.

Dear participants,

Your meeting is a fruit of collaborative efforts jointly made by Al-Azhar Center for Interfaith Dialogue and major church institutes, topped by the World Council of Churches (WCC).

Through this historic forum, the first thing that Al-Azhar wishes to reaffirm in its message to the whole world is that all the Divine religions, sealed by Islam, affirm that man is honored and respected. They prohibit bloodshed, assault, and terrorism. From the Islamic perspective, perpetrating any of such violations is deemed a major crime and corruption that should be encountered to protect the society from its destructive impacts.

The Qur'ān points out in clear-cut terms that the norm of human relationship should be based on *ta'aruf* (knowing one another), cooperation, and exchange of benefits in order to sustain human lives and make the world prosperous. There is no room in Islam for relations that are based on conflicts and economic, cultural or military hegemony among nations and peoples.

This is because the Qur'ānic perspective about the issue of social peace at the local and international levels is derived primarily from a logical fact that has been proved by history and reality. All people can never be united by one religion, dogma, language, ethnicity, color, or fingerprints. Any attempt to bring them together upon one faith or culture is doomed to failure as indicated by history. Simply, it is against the norm of creation as divinely set by the Lord.

Islam is the seal of heavenly religions; its message perfects the previous divine messages to humankind. It is established on firm belief in the past laws revealed to Abraham, Moses, and Jesus (peace be upon them all) and, thus, confirms the Scrolls of Abraham, the Torah of Moses, and the Gospel of Jesus in the same manner it confirms the truth of the Qurʾān. Islam directs its followers to approach the followers of Moses and Jesus kindly, to the extent of allowing Muslim men to marry Christian and Jewish women in the light of the values of goodness, love, and mercy. The Qurʾān states that Allah has placed compassion and mercy in the hearts of the followers of Jesus until the Day of Resurrection.

The call to Allah in Islam is identified to be through wisdom and quiet dialogue that does not insult the others or offend them or their faith. Islam also refuses to promulgate its message through wars or under compulsion. Likewise, it denies the use of money, authority, or temptation to win others' hearts or minds. The Qurʾān states:

- “There is no compulsion in religion.” (Qurʾān, 2:256)
- “Whoever wants to believe let him believe.” (Qurʾān, 18:29)

The role of Prophet Muḥammad (pbuh) as described in the Qurʾān is to show the path to Allah and guide to it. The Prophet (pbuh) is not a controller over people and does not force them to follow him. He just calls them to Allah and shows them the distinction between the path of truth and that of misguidance. Allah states,

- “Your duty is but to convey (the Message).” (Qurʾān, 42:48)
- “You are not over them a controller.” (Qurʾān, 88:22)
- “You are not to compel people to accept faith.” (Qurʾān, 10:99).

For a Muslim, people are either fellow Muslims or fellow human beings. A Muslim, as Prophet Muḥammad (pbuh) tells, is one from [the harm of] whose tongue and hands all people are safe. The real Muslim lives in peace and never hurts any human being, even verbally. Islam forbids all forms of harms against the

followers of other religions. Any Muslim who harms them becomes an enemy to Prophet Muḩammad (pbuh) on the Day of Judgment. Allah and His Messenger (pbuh) rejects such a person in this life and in the Hereafter.

Dear Muslim and Christian young people,

I trust you and place great hopes in the purity of your innate disposition, souls, and minds. I am sure you have freed yourselves from old traditions that prevented past generations from fulfilling their duties of imparting the culture of peace worldwide. I am filled with hope that you will deepen human fraternity and end destructive wars that kill thousands of innocent people and cause the poor and sick people, particularly children and women, to suffer and lose their lives and blood guiltlessly. They have nothing to do with these wars. Absurd decisions initiate wars without acknowledging the right of the poor and fragile people to live in peace. You should combat destructive ideas intended to instigate conflict, violence, and hate.

I have an absolute confidence in your youthful and great enthusiasm and your heightened state of awareness. You will be ambassadors of peace, mercy, and cooperation to the entire humanity. Your first cause should be how to create a new world free from bloodshed, poverty, illness, and ignorance.

It is the message of Al-Azhar that you deserve the Divine support. You are all Al-Azhar ambassadors of the mission of peace to humankind.

Thank you!

May Allah’s peace and blessings be upon you!

(2)

The Speech of H.E. the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar sent to the 18th Forum of Muslims of America

In the Name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Mercy

All praise is due to Allah. May Allah’s Peace and Blessings be upon His Messenger Muḩammad, his Household, and his Companions!

Dear All,
As-Salāmu ʿAlaykum wa Raḩmatu Allahi wa Barakatuh

I commence my speech with giving thanks and offering praise to Allah. I would like to express my sincere gratitude for offering me this great invitation to attend this blessed forum. I ask Allah to grant you success and the potential to achieve the outcomes you aspire at. I wish I could have attended this forum, but some important commitments predetermined before receiving your invitation kept me.

Let me express my profound gratitude for you for holding such a dignified forum. Today, we are in a dire need for such gatherings that put together the efforts of Muslims and make them as united as one body–that when one of its limbs suffers, the whole body responds to it with insomnia and fever. This makes it incumbent upon a Muslim not to have bigotry for one opinion or ideology, nor make it a basis for inciting sectarianism that ultimately causes disunity and division among Muslims and fills them with hate, instead of being brethren in worshipping Allah and cooperating in goodness and piety, as Allah declares, "This nation of yours is one nation."

Islam, moreover, commands its followers to build bridges of cooperation with their brothers in humanity who embrace other faiths, to strive to strengthen the ties of love and amicability, to take the initiative to turn animosity into cordiality by means of Allah's Mercy and Might and to treat them in a good and fair manner. Allah says, "Allah would put affection between you and those to whom you have been enemies among them. Allah is All Competent, All Forgiving and All Merciful. Allah does not forbid you from being righteous to those who do not fight you in your

religion or expel you from your homes or from acting justly toward them. Indeed, Allah loves those who act justly." (Qur'ān 60:7-8)

What makes this forum important is that it is held during such a crucial time when the Islamic communities in the East experience political, economic and social crises that threaten their security and stability. The crisis of having a sense of insecurity about lives, honor, and homeland is probably the worst of all. One more crisis is manifested in the lack of peace, spread of chaos and turmoil, domination of force and vulnerability of the weak. Worse still, the barbaric crimes of killing and blood-shedding taking place now are being committed in the name of religion despite the fact that Allah revealed it as guidance, light and mercy for people.

The voices demanding expulsion of Western Muslims from their lands or marginalizing them at their homes–as some people call—represent fuel and a pretext for radicals and extremists for more violence, killing innocents and attacking their properties and houses. These are all reflections of the deeply-rooted crises of our world today. Sincere humans have to try their best to reject these ideas and confront these attitudes with one purpose, that is to protect the dignity of man—the creature that Allah has preferred over other creatures and blessed with the gift of mind and thinking as a protection against hate, malice, exclusion of others, marginalizing them or infringing upon their rights. All the humans share the same origin, as the Almighty Allah tells us in the Qur'ān, "Humankind, be mindful of your Lord, Who created you from one soul and created from it its mate and dispersed from both of them many men and women." (Qur'ān, 4: 1)

Needless to say, the killing and destruction of these terrorist groups have caused sufferings for the Muslims Nation, and the price is paid by thousands of refugees who forcefully left their homes after being devastated and after losing their families and children. Therefore, they escaped the horrors of war broken out in their homes. Western societies have also suffered this extremism and still suffer tragic events in which many innocent victims are

killed. This matter makes it incumbent upon all of us to work together and cooperate to confront this danger threatening us all. We have to insist on proceeding towards cooperation, love and defending our homes.

Al-Azhar has always openly expressed its view on various international causes that concern the public opinion in international forums, especially those related to the sanctity of human beings, extremism, religious freedom, religious tolerance, cooperation and mutual coexistence for the welfare of all humanity, as well as confronting poverty, problems of the environment and diseases that threaten humans, based on the teachings of the Qurʾān which tells us:

- “Humankind, We have created you from a male and a female and made you peoples and tribes that you may know one another. Indeed, the most noble of you in the sight of Allah are the most righteous. Indeed, Allah is All Knowing, All Acquainted.” (Qurʾān, 49: 13)
- “Help one another in goodness and piety, and do not help one another with sin and aggression and be mindful of Allah. Indeed, Allah is severe in punishment.” (Qurʾān, 5: 2)

Honorable Audience,

The Almighty Allah has not revealed religions as a cause of suffering for peoples or to frighten and terrify them. Rather, religions have been sent as light, guidance and mercy. Muslims, in particular, has nothing to do with terrorism and its consequences of bloodshed and violence. I personally do not know any religion or any Divine book which vowed severe punishment in this world life and the Hereafter for shedding blood as Islam and the Holy Qurʾān do. The Qurʾān prescribed retribution in this world for intentional killing and promised the killer severe punishment in the Hereafter: “Whoever kills a believer deliberately, the punishment for him is Hell, wherein he will remain eternally, and Allah becomes angry with him and curses him, and He has prepared a tremendous torment for him.” (Qurʾān, 4: 93)

How could Islam be described as a religion of terrorism, when Prophet Muḩammed (pbuh) said, "The best Muslim is one from [the harm of] whose tongue and hands other humans are secure"? The Prophet (pbuh) also said, “The Muslim for another Muslim is absolutely inviolable—his blood, property and honor.” Islam does not only prohibit killing and bloodshed but also intimidating people even if that was by joking. The Prophet (pbuh) said, "Whoever points a weapon at his brother, the angels invoke curse upon him even if that is his brother of kinship till he stops." The Prophet (pbuh) also said, "It is not acceptable for a Muslim to frighten another fellow Muslim."

Paradoxically, Islam is charged with terrorism, violence, and barbarianism, when Allah describes His Prophet (pbuh) as "mercy" for all humans. Allah says, “We have not sent you, [Prophet Muḩammad], except as mercy to the worlds.” (Qurʾān, 21: 107) Prophet Muḩammad (pbuh) affirmed that Allah has sent him as a mercy for all the worlds when he described himself, saying, “I am a gift of mercy granted by Allah the Almighty.”

I call upon our brothers and sons who live in the USA and other Western communities to preserve their identities and adhere to their religious teachings. They should provide a good example that embodies the teachings of this true and tolerant religion that calls them to be effective contributors to the building of human civilization wherever they exist, just as their predecessors did. They should contribute to the revival of the communities where they live, to observe the promotion of these communities, to keep them safe and stable, and to not blindly follow these delusive calls that jeopardize their life and expose them to Allah's wrath in this world and the Hereafter.

Allow me to call upon the Western leaders and politicians to avoid generalization and making a connection between the Islamic teachings that call for mercy, tolerance, forgiveness and brotherhood, based on justice, fairness and beneficence on the one hand, and what the terrorists who merchandize religion do. Terrorism has no relation with any religion or country. I remind you that the Muslim scholars and historians were so fair and

objective in differentiating between religions, their principles and leaders, on the one hand, and the deviations committed by some followers of these religions, on the other.

Evidently, when we observe the Islamic scholarly heritage, we find that the Muslims used to call the terrorist Crusade wars as "foreign wars." They did not attribute them to religions, though these wars were waged in the name of religion. They would not attribute them to Jesus, because they have been aware that there is a big difference between religions as Divine guidance and those who merchandize religions for personal whims and political expansion. This is what Al-Azhar has confirmed in the Conference convened by Al-Azhar, particularly to confront all forms of terrorism. Prominent Muslim scholars and representatives of the religious leaders of various Eastern and Western Churches and other ethnic and religious sects attended this conference.

Al-Azhar is always ready to offer you help and support by sending imams and scholars to promote the true understanding of religion and to correct misconceptions about Islam, as well as to grant scholarships for your sons and daughters to study at Al-Azhar.

To conclude, I thank you again for your invitation, and I ask Allah to grant you success, to bless your efforts and to unite our word for the welfare and stability of all humanity!

The Speech of H.E. the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar at the Conference on Terrorism

In the Name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful

Hello, our dear guests who kindly heeded our invitation, coming from the farthest lands of the East and the West. We thank you all and welcome you to Egypt—your second home, a friendly country to yours that we believe to occupy a special place in your hearts. Al-Azhar is indeed delighted to receive you all and it looks forward to benefit from your cooperation and from your learned endeavors at this very critical moment in the history of our Muslim Nation and for the sake of its future.

This conference does not only bring together many distinguished personages from the Arab and Muslim East, but it also indeed brings together the Sunni and Shiite Muslims, the Christians from different denominations, and other creeds and doctrines that grew and developed in the East and benefited from its richness and the goodness. It is also a conference that comes at a most critical and a most troubled period of time, when our countries and our nations are besieged by many dangers, externally and internally. Wherever you turn your gaze on the map of the Middle East, you will be horrified by the tragic spectacles. One is deeply confused and unable to find a single rational explanation to justify the mass deliberate destruction befalling lives, habitats, and properties alike. This destruction disintegrates the Muslim Nation and its civilization, and causes its history to vanish.

Day and night, I keep asking myself and my visitors about what could be the real cause behind this Arab crisis. This state of blind strife is characterized with a stench of blood and death, bombings and explosions, the sight of beheadings, dislocation of millions and destruction of the vestiges of civilized existence and of whole countries. That is all done with savagery that was never known to us before, and indeed may never happen again. It is all committed by these factions, the case which forms a new development in our civilization and our culture, particularly in the way they contravene all the interdictions that have long been established by religions, ethics and common human decencies.

Such ethics should have marked a distinction between rational human beings and beasts of prey.

A third grievous calamity, my dear brothers, is that these barbaric and heinous crimes are being committed by donning the mantle of this true religion, giving the dark dens, where such crimes are being plotted. In the name of "the Islamic State" or "the Islamic Caliphate" or some such misnomer or spurious titles, there has been an attempt to send abroad an image of a disfigured Islam that brands this religion as one that brings slaughter, beheadings and dislocation to all who dare be different from it. This hateful and calumnious image of our true religion has long been conjured, fancied and waited for by the enemies of Islam. Indeed, they have long been murmuring incantations around it, construing artful falsehood, spreading calumnies and lies. It is thus most likely that these very enemies will now confront us with this disfigured image to further embarrass us, through all their satellite screens, so as to finally achieve their goal and send warning alarms to all the nations of the world about this "bloodthirsty and barbaric religion".

When one seeks the reasons behind the rise of such armed groups, taking note of their quick expansion across Arab and Muslim countries, one is faced with various explanations, ranging from religious, economic, cultural, to political explanations that this conference shall have ample time to consider. I would also like here to draw your kind attention to yet another explanation that deserves our close examination. This is the one that sees our present sufferings as nothing other than the result of a conspiracy, wrought by the enemies of the Arab and Muslim East, for the benefit of the State of Israel, so that it can be the most powerful and the most affluent in the region. On our part, we do not consider such an explanation to be a far-fetched one. Indeed, the State of Iraq was invaded under false pretenses in 2003. Lies were deliberately foisted on us to that end, only to be revealed later as unfounded by the international media. This fact is also acknowledged by the great world powers themselves. The first patch woven of the plot by the invaders was to disband the Iraqi

army which was one of the most powerful Arab armies. Not only were the officers and the soldiers disbanded, but their weapons were left to be vandalized by the warring factions and militias, despite the full awareness of the invaders of the deep divisions that existed in terms of sects, creeds and loyalties. So, what was the final outcome after eleven years from the invasion of Iraq? Iraq has fallen into a maelstrom of endless fighting, swimming in seas of blood, with no shore in sight, to this day. The same thing may also be said of Syria, Yemen and Libya. The conspiracy plays at the same fault lines of doctrines, sects and ethnicities, supplying the factions with arms to further add fuel to the fires, letting death reap thousands of the Nation's youthful lives. In all of these afflicted countries, only Allah knows when the roaring machinery of war will finally be silent or when these countries will be guided by their own light, instead of succumbing to outside pressures from both regional and international interventions.

We are quite certain that those who perpetrated such plots are now reaping great benefits from the inter-fighting of Muslims, for this fighting will keep the Arabs and the Muslims in a state of depletion and despair that knows no respite. They can never now muster any strength, achieve any development or make any progress. It is a war by proxy, in which case the real inciters of the fighting will lose nothing of value, neither in lives nor in resources. Moreover, the inter-Arab fighting opens big markets for the arms industry and for the dealers in war, death and destruction. It is enough proof, over the years, that the Syrian theatre has now become an open field of war, where the Western and Eastern arms industry may vie and compete.

I so much wish—and wishing is the resort of the helpless—that the arms industry will find some remote desert or wasteland to try its weaponry and to test its strength away from the chests of the Arabs, their habitats and their constructed environments.

Gentlemen,

The conspiracy theory is not all there is, for there is yet another deeper reason, one that goes back to our own Arab and Muslim history and it is now almost a constant element of our

internal dealings. This is the tendency for indirect rupture, disputing, and contradiction. I have no wish to digress here to deal with this scourge, neither briefly nor at any length. The Qur'ān has already warned us of its dire consequences in the words of Allah: "Obey Allah and His Messenger and do not quarrel among yourselves, lest you lose heart and your momentum disappears. Be steadfast, for Allah is with the steadfast." (Qur'ān, 8:46)

Our Muslim Nation owns all potential for unity, when compared to other nations, as it shares language, ethnicity, religion, history and geography. There are also an Arab League and an organization of Islamic Cooperation, established some half a century ago. Yet, unfortunately, it still lacks union. It is quite possible, or at least not unlikely, for it to be like the European Union. One needs to have sincere intention and a long-term vision to achieve this aim, setting all domestic conflicts aside. The Arabs are with no doubt highly qualified and eminently capable of achieving such a union, if only they so wished. In this context, Al-Azhar Al-Sharif highly esteems the Custodian of Two Holy Mosques, for his tireless efforts to unite the Arabs before the challenges and the dangers that now face the Muslim Nation. Against such dangers, there could be no shield unless we Arabs forget our differences and extinguish the raging fires and unite to confront this devouring monster. The international alliance has to muster all its energies and resources, both moral and material, to defeat terrorism in all its forms and varieties by confronting those states that stand behind it and support it with arms and financial resources. In so doing, the alliance will actually be helping its own nations, let alone defending the Arab Nation.

We must not disregard taking the responsibility for allowing the extremist ideas that have seeped into the minds of some youths, driving them to declare Muslims disbelievers. They also embrace harsh or violent interpretations of the sacred texts, such as we find in Al-Qaida and the armed movements that derive from it, who work day and night to attack our homelands and to destabilize our societies. This trend has lately manifested itself in the ISIS, an organization that calls for an Islamic caliphate. Before that and

after it, there were also the sectarian killer militias who possess great power and a vast propaganda machine. All of these together have brought the worst of consequences upon Islam and the Muslims worldwide.

The ISIS, however, is not the only armed organization on the ground. There are also the sectarian militias who keep slaughtering people and forcibly dislocating them in Syria, Iraq and Yemen. There are also sectarian groups trying to push their countries into a state of subordination to certain regional powers, in the name of democracy and human rights, like we find in Bahrain, for example. All of these have their own sheikhs, who issue *fatwa*s (religious rulings) permitting such crimes and encouraging people to commit them. In fact, it is difficult to speak further about such a grievous tragedy. We think only of the unity of the Muslims, which is one of the noblest of goals for Al-Azhar, This is due to its inception as an institution, and ever since its call began to spread in the horizons for more than a thousand years now.

What unites all of these groups is a common denominator that determines all their crimes and to which they all cling. This is to pronounce all Muslims as disbelievers for some wrong doing or another, thus holding it as lawful to spill their blood. This brings to our minds the crimes committed by some of the sects of old, that vanished in the mist of history, who would kill Muslims after pronouncing them as disbelievers on the basis of an erroneous and deviant understanding of the Qur’ān and the Prophet's Tradition (the Sunnah). The new extremists express this very belief, after perverting the proper meaning of the concept disbelief as well as the concept of belief, even though disbelief has been defined by the Prophet (peace be upon him) by the instruction of Archangel Gabriel, peace be upon him. Muslims have always subscribed to this definition which stipulates that no Muslim may be pronounced as a disbeliever, merely on account of having committed a sin, even if this sin may be a grave one (*kabīrah*), unless the culprit in question actually believes his sin to be lawful. For disbelief is a denial in the heart or an absence of belief in Allah, His Angels, His

Prophets, His Revelations, the Last Day and Destiny, whether it is to one's liking or not. Whoever believes in all of that may not be pronounced a disbeliever.

The concept of *jihad* (sacred war) too was perverted by these armed groups of extremists and sectarians. They would kill anyone they wish by under the pretext of *jihad*, while claiming that whoever is killed from their own ranks is a martyr in Paradise. This is indeed a most objectionable understanding of the Islamic Sharia (Law).

First: *Jihad* is legitimate in Islam only when it is waged in self-defense, in the defense of one's religion or in the defense of one's country. We have learnt from our scholars in Al-Azhar Al-Sharif that the legitimate cause for fighting is to fight against aggression, not disbelief.

Second: the declaration of *jihad* and engaging in it may not be undertaken by just anyone, but only by the Nation's ruler. It may not be undertaken by mere individuals or groups who claim power, no matter what justification they may have. Otherwise, the outcome of such behavior will be to plunge a whole society into a morass of chaos (*fitnah*), bloodshed, rape and pillage, which is what we suffer nowadays due to this mistaken understanding of Sharia rulings.

It is a fact then that Islam prohibits violence against any human being, regardless of his religion or belief: "Because of that, We ordained for the Children of Israel that if anyone killed a person not in retaliation of murder, or due to spreading mischief in the land, it would be as if he killed all of humankind." (Qur'ān, 5:32) Indeed, how could that be, when Islam has opened up even to the followers of other religions, to the extent of allowing mixed marriages, in which two different religions may live together under the same roof. By this, Islam does not only accept coexistence but also the mixing of families.

Whatever be the misunderstanding among certain Muslims of the question of the caliphate, or the leadership, it is an established principle, among the scholars of the fundamentals of religion that the question of political leadership belongs to the

legal issues, not the universal doctrines of religion. It is thus susceptible to differing opinions, a well-established principle known by heart even by the youngest students at the Faculty of Religious Fundamentals at Al-Azhar. In the book of Explaining the Stations (*Sharḥu l-Mawāqif*), which is one of the pivotal works of Ash‘arite theology, stipulated by the curriculum of Al-Azhar, the author says that it (political leadership) is not one of the fundamentals of religion to us, but one of its derivatives.[10]

In *Sharḥu l-Maqāṣid,* which is part of the curriculum of the Faculty of Theology, the prominent Sunni theologian Sa‘d Al-Taftazāniy says, ‘There is no dispute among theologians that the question of the political leadership is more befitting of legal issues than universal doctrines. This principle is indeed a constantly-stated one in the theological works of Sunni Islam. How can such a question become a great cause for strife and for so much bloodshed and destruction, disfiguring in the very image of this true religion?

One needs to digress for so long if one tries to enumerate all the Sharia concepts and rulings that were disfigured, infringed upon and taken out of context by the unwholesome disposition of these groups in order for them to justify the killing of people. I shall leave to this conference the task of setting these misconceptions aright by reference to both our transmitted and intellectual traditions. Afterwards, such contributions may be published, for the whole world to see, as part of the final statement of the conference, to state the truth and clear up one's conscience.

Dear brothers and friends,

We sense the great need to direct the efforts of our youth, to seek scientific, technological and cultural progress so that we may hope to catch up one day with the other nations of the world, which are ahead of us now in the exercise of leadership and influence over the destiny of humanity, directing its march as well

---

10 *Sharḥu l-Mawāqif. Bulāq, 1266 AH,* vol. 2, p. 603.

as determining its ends. Now, this march stands in great need for guidance by the light of the Heavenly Revelations and for the discipline from religious ethics if we are to alleviate the sufferings brought on people by the international politics. Such politics operate in the absence of the values bequeathed to us by the Prophets and the Heavenly Messengers who were sent to humanity only to guide it and lead it to happiness in this world and the next.

Dear Brothers

Al-Azhar Al-Sharif has been exerting continuous efforts towards the formulation of a conscious and well-guided religious discourse, of which the structure must be well-founded on the Noble Qurʾān and on the Holy Traditions of the Prophet's Sunnah, as well as on the well-received opinions of the scholars over the centuries.

From that vantage point, I appeal to all Muslims, asking them to have the greatest confidence in Al-Azhar Al-Sharif, both as a mosque and a university, for it is your honest instructor in the affairs of religion, whether those that pertain to the creed or to the right path (Sharia). It is all done with purity and wholesomeness, as it was willed by Allah and conveyed by His Messenger (pbuh), far removed from the perversions of extremists, the wiles of deceivers and the misinterpretations of the ignorant.

Finally, as we confront terrorism, extremism and unwarranted interpretations of our religion, such challenges that keep us daily occupied must not take us far away from the primary cause of all the Arabs and Muslims. That is the Farthest Mosque (*Al-Aqṣ*ā), the first orientation of prayer and the third most holy mosque in Islam. There will be no peace for our world without resolving the question of Palestine, radically and justly.

Al-Azhar Al-Sharif is now resolved to devote its 15th conference to the question of Palestine. May Allah almighty give us all success in doing whatever is necessary for the good of humanity at large.

The Opening Speech of His Eminence the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar at Al-Azhar World Peace Conference

In the Name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful
May Allah's Peace and Blessings be upon you.

At the outset, I would like to welcome you and notably the honorable guests of Egypt.

Distinguished Guests of the Eastern and Western Churches,
Your Eminence and Your Excellency,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to welcome you all and cordially thank you wholeheartedly for accepting the invitation of Al-Azhar Al-Sharif and the Muslim Council of Elders (MCE) to attend the conference organized by Al-Azhar entitled. "Al-Azhar International Peace Conference". This is not our first conference to discuss the issue and may not be the last. Being one of the speakers in this opening session, I think that the issue of the international peace, despite what has been said in this regard, needs more follow-up, contemplation and research. This is mainly because international peace is one of the most complex and intractable concepts for anyone who thinks logically and axiomatically as a result of the state of confusion that leads to corrupted hypotheses, analogies and arguments. Contrary to the opinion of the history philosophers supporting the peace theory, it seems that peace is no longer the basic norm in the life of humankind. Those philosophers assert that peace is the basic norm in the life of humankind and that war and violence are exceptions and anomalies. The proponents of the war theory may be more far-reaching when they say that the human history is full of bloodshed. The history tells us that humanity has not enjoyed long time to live in full and lasting peace. Some American writers indicated that peace prevailed only in 268 years out of the written history of humankind that lasted for three thousand and five hundred years. The remaining years were full of wars. Accordingly, the well-known American writer,

George Will, concludes that peace cannot provide self-protection.[11]

No doubt that this ebb and flow in observing the concept of peace attracts many to search for it in other transcendent sources, *viz.* sources beyond time and space which are not affected by the environment or the surrounding circumstances and variable historical implications. By transcendental sources which are beyond change, subjectivism, advantage, purpose and consideration, I mean the Heavenly religions and theirs holy texts. We take refuge in them as scared birds take refuge in theirs safe and secure nests.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Allow me to move from this introduction, a little prolonged, to a brief word on the philosophy of peace in Islam, which is my guidance in knowing the true thoughts and good deeds and manners. For me, it is important to say that all that can be said about peace in Islam can also be told in Christianity and Judaism. This is not a compliment, although complimenting you should be praiseworthy in such a situation as this. Based on the teachings of the Qurʾān, my creed inspires me as a Muslim that the message of Mohammad (pbuh) is not separated or different from the messages of Jesus, Moses, Abraham and Noah, peace be upon them all. Rather, it is the final ring in the chain of one religion from Adam to the Prophet of Islam. All these messages agree in their content and there is no difference among them except for variable practical regulations. Every message has its practical regulations that match its time, place and the people believing in it.

The time is insufficient to cite the Qurʾānic verses affirming that what Allah has revealed to Mohammad is the same that was revealed to Noah, Abraham, Moses and Jesus, peace be upon them all.

This shows us the reason behind agreement of religions upon the principal morals and good values. Rhythm of Ten

[11] See: *Peace for Better World*, by Abdel-Fattah Mohsen Badwi, (U.d. pp.15-27).

Commandments, Sermon on the Mount, and verses which include the same commandments are in harmony in one passionate language.

With regard to the philosophy of peace in Islam, let me show you the same in the form of messages which lead to each other reasonably. Such messages are as follows:

The Holy Qurʾān acknowledges the difference between people in religions, beliefs, languages and colors. Allah intends to make difference between His servants. "Difference" is the enactment of Allah with His servants, which will never be altered or changed till the world ultimately ceases to exist.

The fact on difference in religions leads reasonably to the right of freedom of belief. Freedom of belief and difference in religions are two sides of one and the same coin. Furthermore, freedom of belief necessarily requires preventing compulsion in accepting religion. The Holy Qurʾān expressly acknowledges the freedom of belief, including preventing compulsion in the acceptance of creeds.

When we try to make conformity between the people who believe in different religions and who are free in selecting their beliefs, we will find that the Holy Qurʾān explicitly defines such relation in two frames.

First, a frame of dialogue, which is not just any dialogue, but it should be one based on respect and good manners, especially if the dialogue is between a Muslim, on the one hand, and a Christian or a Jew, on the other. Addressing the believers, the Qurʾān says, “Do not dispute with the People of the Book (i.e. the Jews and Christians) except in the fairest manner.” (Qurʾān, 26: 46) “Speak fair to humankind.” (Qurʾān, 2: 83)

The second frame is one of acquaintance, which is based on understanding, cooperation, efficacy and affection. “Humankind, We have created you of a male and a female, and made you races and tribes so that you may get mutually acquainted. Surely, the most honorable among you with Allah are the most pious; surely Allah is All Knowing, All Cognizant.” (Qurʾān, 49: 13). The

Qurʾān reminds us first of the unity of origin, then it reminds us of what is appropriate for such unity, which is acquaintance.

It is clear to us, dear brothers, that the Qurʾān defines the relationship between people in terms of a relationship of acquaintance that is considered a logical consequence due to the kind of discrepancies and freedom of belief. Wars in Islam are resorted to only when necessary. It is an exception only in the case of imperative necessity. This is exactly the advice of the Prophet of Islam who says, “Do not wish to meet the enemy, and ask Allah for safety.”

War is not an offensive action; rather it should be resorted to only for defense. The first permission that allowed Muslims to get involved in war was justifiable by staggering injustice and in defense of the oppressed people. It is mentioned in Qurʾān that, “To those against whom war is made, permission is given (to fight) because they are wronged; Allah is really Most Powerful for their aid.” (Qurʾān, 22: 39) Permissibility of war in Islam is not confined to defending mosques only; rather it includes defending churches and synagogues. If you would wonder, surely wonderful is a religion that calls his followers for fighting to secure the people of other Divine religions and their places of worship.

The question that we often hear is why Islam fought Non-Muslims? An answer to this question is that Islam did not fight anyone due to their being disbelievers. This contradicts with what the Qurʾān calls Muslims for during their wars: "So whoever wills let him believe; and whoever wills let him disbelieve". Therefore, Islam does not coerce others to embrace it forcibly and the Qurʾān states, “There is no compulsion in religion.” (Qurʾān, 2:256)

Islam fights others only to prevent aggression and it does not matter whether they are disbelieving or believing aggressors. The Holy Qurʾān states, “If two parties among the believers fall into a quarrel, make peace between them. But if one of them transgresses beyond bounds against the other, then fight against the one that transgresses until it complies with the command of Allah.” (Qurʾān, 49:9)

Such a quick view based on clear sacred texts proves that Islam is a religion of peace and not a religion of aggression. All the other Divine religions have the same view regarding such pivotal origin of peace. Significant questions, nevertheless, remain that I will conclude with.
If Islamic texts, some of which I have just mentioned, reveal the openness of Islam to other religions and its respect of other religions and beliefs, then how could Islam be described as a "religion of terrorism"?! In response, some of those who practice terrorist acts are Muslims! Can we then say that Christianity is a religion of terrorism just because some terrorist acts have been practiced in its name? Does that also mean that Judaism can be described as a religion of terrorism because some horrible atrocities were acted in its name?

If it is true to say that we should not judge any religion by the crimes of some of its followers, then why should this not apply to Islam? Why do we insist on keeping Islam, wrongfully and totally falsely, along with what is so-called Islamophobia?

Can we then take advantage of such a unique conference to let the world know that religions are innocent of all forms of terrorism? Can we point out, though timidly, that the evil terrorism that takes the lives of Muslims in the Middle East, regardless of its name, title, and banner, has no relationship with the Islamic law or the Holy Qur'ān? In fact, such far-reaching causes are rather due to the policies of great injustice used to dominate, seek hegemony, and apply double standards?

Thank you for your attention. I do apologize for speaking at length.

As-Salāmu 'Alaykum wa Raḥmatu Allahi wa Barakatuh
(May the Peace and Blessing of Allah be with you)

Professor Ahmad Muḥammad At-Tayyeb,

Grand Imam of Al-Azhar
Mashyakhat Al-Azhar
Sha'ban 1, 1438 AH (April 27, 2017)

The Speech of H.E. the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar at Al-Azhar World Peace Conference Welcoming the Pope of the Vatican

In the Name of Allah, the Gracious, the Merciful

His Holiness Pope Francis of the Vatican,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I greet you all with the greeting of peace:
As-Salāmu 'Alaykum wa Raḥmatu Allahi wa Barakatuh
(May the Peace and Blessing of Allah be with you)

Al-Azhar and the Muslim Council of Elders (MCE) warmly welcome and thank you all for your honorable acceptance of our invitation. We deeply appreciate your visit to Egypt and Al-Azhar in response to Al-Azhar invitation. Together, we can undertake our collective historical responsibility as religious leaders and scholars to work for peace and relieve the unfortunate nations that aimlessly flee wars to vast empty deserts. Many leave their homelands to other far destinations in pursuit of new hosting homes, while uncertain whether they would reach them or drown and die. It is unfortunate to see human bodies and parts of human bodies on seashores in a horribly grievous human tragedy. It may not be far from the truth to state that this human tragedy is unprecedented throughout the human history.

People of common sense and watchful conscience try to find out the logic and reasons behind these tragedies for which lives and whole countries are lost in futile wars. However, they came to no logical reason justifying these disasters which have badly affected the poor, the orphans, the widows and the aged. Only one reason is there with reasonable logic. That is arms trade and marketing that guarantees the continuous operation of death plants and extraordinary profits resulting from suspicious deals backed by reckless international resolutions. For the sake of that hateful trade, hotbeds of tensions are created, and religious seditions and racial and sectarian conflicts among the citizens of the same homeland are inflamed, thus turning the human life into an unbearable vicious hell.

Ironically, this sharp disaster is taking place in the 21st century, presumably the century of civilization, urbanity, human

rights, epistemological progresses, and tremendous scientific advancements and technologies. It is also the century of peace organizations working for maintaining international peace and security, whose conventions criminalize the use of force and threatening to use it in international relations. This suffering comes in a century of human philosophies and teachings, promotion of human egalitarianism, one-class social equality, and postmodernity, among many other achievements with which our modern age is distinguished.

Here, it is crucial to wonder how international peace has become a paradise lost and how the age of human rights has badly plagued with savagely unprecedented atrocities! I have an answer which you may also approve. I think that the modern civilization has ignored the divine religions and their well-established ethics. These ethics remain the same regardless of earthly interests and purposes, not to mention the dominance of selfish desires and interests. Within this set of ethics, there are human fraternity, human mutual understanding and mercy, which all mindfully depict the whole creations as the servants of Allah. The most beloved of Allah's servants to Allah is one who extends the most benefits to Allah's servants. This value can prevent the world from shifting into a wilderness with monstrous animals of prey devouring one another.

Thinkers of the East and the West would then emphasize that our only solution is to restore awareness of the heavenly-revealed religions and review the deviated modernized discourse deeply and critically to free the human mind from the claws of the emptiness of the materialist experimental philosophy. Under such philosophy, the minds of human individuals aim to limitlessly go their way and dominate the life of other human beings. Post-modernity shall not be a mere process of beautifying such views with brand-aided philosophies of affection and passion. For believers and philosophers, there is no way but to reformulate all that is in the context of fraternity and mutual mercy before

anything else.[12] Such a context is the antidote for reviving virtuous philosophies as well as other all-inclusive good scientific and practical models. This antidote only exists in the pharmacy of religion.

I do think that the world is currently prepared for religions to undertake their missions. They should stress the value of peace, justice, equality and human rights among people, regardless of their beliefs, colors, races, and tongues. The Glorious Qurʾān, frequently read by Muslims day and night, simply declares,

- "We [Allah] have honored the Children of Adam and carried them in the land and the sea.
- We [Allah] have provided for them of the good things.
- We [Allah] have preferred them over many of those We created in marked preference." (Qurʾān, 17: 70)

First of all, we need to free the image of religions from false concepts, misunderstandings, malpractices and false religiosity attached to them. These evils flame conflicts, spread hate and instigate violence. We should not hold religion accountable for the crimes of any small group of followers. For example, Islam is not a religion of terrorism adopted by a group of followers who carelessly rush to manipulate Islamic texts and misinterpret them ignorantly. Then, they shed blood, kill people, and spread destruction. Unfortunately, they find available sources of finance, weapons, and training. Likewise, Christianity is not a religion of terrorism just because a group of its followers carries the cross and decimates people without distinction between men and women, adults and children, or fighters, and captives.

Likewise, Judaism is not a religion of terrorism just because a group of its followers deceitfully employs the teachings of Moses, occupying lands and extirpating millions of the indigenous defenseless civilian citizens of the Palestinian people who have genuine rights to this land. Furthermore, it is

---

[12] Taha Abdur-Rahman, *Rūḥ ul-Ḥadāthah*, p. 214 [footnote], Morocco: Arab Culture Center, 2006.

not fair to say that the European civilization is a civilization of terrorism because two world wars broke out in Europe leaving behind more than seventy millions of deaths. By the same token the American civilization, whose atom bombings destroyed everything on earth in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, may not be labeled as terrorist. If we open the doors for accusations in the same way Islam is approached, no religion, regime, civilization, or history would stand innocent from violence and terrorism.

Dear Pope,

We deeply appreciate your fair declaration in support of the truth and defense of Islam against the accusation of violence and terrorism. We feel how you and all attending notable fathers of Eastern and Western churches are keen to respect religious beliefs and symbols and safeguard them from any offense, standing against those who employ such offense to foment conflicts among the believers.

Al-Azhar is determined to work and cooperate for the calls of establishing coexistence, reviving dialogue, respecting all human beliefs, and protecting them. We have many shared values and fields to work on. Meanwhile, the common challenges that we have to meet, as religious leaders, are also many. Let us work for the sick, the hungry, the afraid, the prisoners of wars, and all other suffering human beings in the world without discrimination, distinction or classification. We shall all work together to save the human family from the threats of immorality and the violations of scientific research and researchers' deviations and incautiousness.

Let us all cooperate to save the environment from corruption and corrupters. Let us all stand against the policies of hegemony and the theories of the clash of civilizations, the end of history, calls to atheism, Machiavellian mentality, and irreligious modernity, as well as against all the bad consequences and disasters that follow from them everywhere.

Finally, I pray that Allah—the Source of all Mercy—make this meeting a real opportunity for human cooperation to

promote the culture of peace, human fraternity, and coexistence!

Thank you so much.

As-Salāmu ʽAlaykum wa Raḩmatu Allahi wa Barakatuh

(May the Peace and Blessing of Allah be with you)

Mashyakhat Al-Azhar

Aḩmad At-Tayyeb,

Grand Imam of Al-Azhar

Sha‘bān 2, 1438 AH (April 28, 2017)

The Speech of H.E. the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar at the Riyadh Conference in 2017

(Misk Foundation)

In the Name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As-Salāmu ʿAlaykum wa Raḥmatu Allahi wa Barakatuh

(May the Peace and Blessing of Allah be with you)

You may agree with me that such is not the moment for sweet talks, verbal embellishments, bombasts, and other common rhetoric usually used and always assessed in such important forums that discuss reality and its current crises. Misk Charitable Foundation has done well in identifying the source of the problem and addressing it from different views and perspectives.

It gives me much pleasure to take part in this important forum. I hope you allow me to present my view briefly. I hope that it comes in line with the miserable reality that Eastern and Western countries currently suffer and to express reality apart from mere inspirations and hopes that do not reflect the running painful miseries and afflictions.

There is no doubt that the source of defection and the main cause of diseases in our Arab and Islamic countries lie in their permanent and frequent heedlessness, intentionally or unintentionally, of the Holy Qurʾān that once made them a united Nation that led and enlightened the world. In addition, the Holy Qurʾān teaches the world the values of justice, fraternity, and equality and how to hold the means of physical and moral strengths.

In this Clear Book, that is the profound Divine truth to the Muslims in this world and the Hereafter, there is a decisive and explicit verse that forbids Muslims and those in charge of Muslim leadership, including the scholars who are the heirs of Prophets, from disputation, division, and disagreement. In addition, it forewarns them from losing courage, from weakness and humiliation that will be an inevitable result if they disobey such Divine Law. Other nations realize the value of this Divine Law and preserve it. Their major interests would thus work together regardless of their different languages, races, cultures, and

doctrines. Allah says, “Do not dispute and lose courage, lest your strength would be lost.” (Qurʾān, 8: 46)

Dear all,

Let us look around! Is there any reason for wars that turn everything to ashes, other than disputation resulting in losing courage and strength, the case that the Holy Qurʾān warns against! See how the World War I lasted for less than four years and the World War II for less than six years, while the war launched in our region has begun years ago, whose fire is till flaming until now. Once it is about to abate, it breaks out in more terrible ways over and again.

If division represents the main source of illness, then it is fair to state that the international and regional greedy ambitions, dominated by the mentality of colonists as well as the dreamers of reviving the former past based on racial dominance and sectarian expansion, form another reason. Such greedy ambitions are not accepted by any religion or human morals. Actually, all international conventions reject them and the honorably wise men of the civilized world totally refuse them. The impact of this disease infected the nation and caused it to be coveted by enemies and predators. It is not limited to regression and failure at all levels. Its disastrous impact extends to affect understanding the Islamic Sharia and cause people to be confused about its meaning, especially those who are young. This impact has recently crystallized in the phenomenon of radicalization, extremism, and terrorism which, to our bitterness and pain, managed to introduce this pure religion to the world as a bloodthirsty religion calling for brutal killings and savage massacres unknown in the Muslim's long history over about fifteen centuries.

If a Muslim's most bitter enemy were to scheme against Islam to drive people away from it, the impact of that damage would not amount to a little portion of the impact of a single photo of slaughtering, killing or bombing the innocent people. This false and misshaped image of Islam, the true religion of peace, is insistently projected by some traditional and social media as the image through which the world has to view Islam.

Behind his betrayal to history, truth, and fairness always lies those who conspire against peoples and manipulate their destinies and resources.

If we search for the real causes behind these phenomena, which are extraneous to Islam, Muslims and their history and civilization both in form and content, I have no doubt that the cause is the strong wave of hatred that invades the minds of some deluded youth. It prepares them to achieve a malicious plan, masterminded overseas, after finding loopholes or weak points in our education and policies, and to use their outcomes, the case which enabled them to easily recruit those young people.

I do not wish to talk for long about the educational crisis in the Arab and Muslim world. Rather, I will be content with saying that some curricula stem from somewhat religious exaggerations and extremisms that appeared in our heritage. These trends are due to deviated interpretations of some texts of the Qur'ān , the Sunnah, and statements of some leading scholars. These misinterpretations were used to sort people on the basis of their faiths and label them for the slightest reason. They also led those people of misunderstanding to hold juristic and doctrinal statements issued in specific circumstances during certain periods of time, and consider them as succinct texts and fundamentals whose absoluteness mount to that of the Qur'ān and the Sunnah. They also treat them as standards against which they judge people as heretics, transgressors, and even disbelievers.

We have seen how such groups rush blindly in ignorance to describe rulers as disbelievers. They consider the ruled people and Muslim scholars disbelievers too when they accept them as rulers or when scholars refuse to describe those rulers as disbelievers.

They extend their judgment of disbelief to all those who reject their doctrine and do not follow their religious leaders as well as to all groups that refuse to join them. "They consider all the ages of Islam following the fourth century as ages of disbelief due to assuming *taqleed* (adopting the teachings of previous

scholars) against the Divine Will."[13] I hardly need to highlight the close relationship between the doctrine of *takfīr* (excommunicating others and calling them disbelievers) on the one hand and the culture of hatred, rejection and contempt of others, on the other.

What caused this despicable culture to spread is the exploitation of the enormous progress in technology by those deviant people in order to promote their poisoned ideas among the youth. There are also the deliberate methods they use to seduce their victims by affecting them mentally and emotionally, moving their behavior through practical engagement.

Dear all,

I do not like repeating what you already know, but it is an inevitable prelude to find out an unconventional way out of this crisis associating the vilest and heinous crimes with Islam and Muslims. I argue that misreading this excommunicating thought and taking long time to decisively condemn it both have served the exacerbation of this epidemic and its spread among the young. However, I would not argue that the situation is so desperate. There would be spots of light and hope only when there are sincere intentions and goodwill. We should all stand united and our intentions should be the same.

Having concluded that youth have been intellectually abducted for the above-mentioned reasons, we must seriously and bravely acknowledge the necessity of reconstructing the education process and curricula taught at various stages. This requires hard coordination between the officials of religious education institutions and those concerned with general education institutions and universities, culture, youth, and sports. Such coordination aims to develop an integrated educational strategy in which religion is presented in the image that Allah wanted it to be. It should be guidance, mercy, facilitation, and mitigation of

13 Moustafa bin Ḥamzah (2016), *Thaqafatul ’Irhāb: Qira’atun Shar‘iyah* (The Culture of Terrorism). In: *Al-Azhar fi Muwajahat il-Fikr il-’Irhābiyy* (Al-Azhar Confronts Terrorist Thought), p. 2015, 2nd edition, adapted.

hardships that people face. In addition, religion should affirm sanctity of the blood, inviolability of properties and chastity, and establishment of the values of brotherhood and tolerance.

Having agreed also on the danger of the abuse of social media in this crisis, it is time to think about a proper solution to put an end to the extravagance of accusation of disbelief, sectarianism, and confessionalism, widely spreading in cyberspace without any controls. This solution must stop the raging race to corrupt the youth and prevent the destructive attitude that paves the way for new colonial policies and projects of division, fragmentation, and humiliation of peoples.

Al-Azhar has realized the grave danger surrounding the Muslim youth. It has established an electronic observer to combat extremist ideology, correct misconceptions, and protect youth against the culture of violence and hatred. The Observer includes more than 100 researchers of Al-Azhar graduates who convey their messages in 11 languages. This is part of a new strategy that aims to utilize all the modern means of communication in countering terrorist thought.

Today, my message to the Muslim youth is to adhere to their religion that respects humanity, forbids killing, and protects chastity. They must be proud of their Prophet (pbuh) that Allah has sent as mercy to the entire world. The Prophet (pbuh) said about himself, "People, I am a gifted mercy." Our beloved youth, you should know that extremism, exaggeration, and using killing as a tool for calling to Islam are among the reasons behind rejecting religion. You should also know that extremists and terrorists are the fastest deviants from the true path of religion. Moreover, the history will curse those who seek to destroy their homelands. They will sink into oblivion, but the homelands will remain as witnesses to their deviation.

You should also be aware that the Holy Qurʾān has specified the ways of calling to Islam, namely wisdom, good instruction, and argument in the best way, rather than bomb belts and explosives.

Beloved Muslim Youth!

You should have independent personalities. Never allow the fabrications and misinformation you receive from the social media to deceive you. You are responsible, on the Day of Judgment, for using your minds to distinguish between truth and falsehood and for leaving them to others to tamper with, however and whenever they wish.

In conclusion, I would like to remind the leaders of America and the Arab and Muslim Summit that peoples of this war-torn region, who are displaced, unsafe, deprived, and ill in deserts, expect crucial resolutions from this Summit. Such resolutions should uproot and dry up the sources of terrorism, put an end to tampering with people's lives and homeland security, and ensure safe and valuable life to them.

Likewise, I would like to remind that the Palestinian issue, the first issue of the Arabs and Muslims, is at the forefront of issues that wait for a fair situation from this international Summit in order to achieve security, peace, and stability for the people of Palestine and the peoples of the Arab and Muslim Worlds.

Thank you for your kind attention.

As-Salāmu ʿAlaykum wa Raḥmatu Allahi wa Barakatuh

(May the Peace and Blessing of Allah be with you)

Sha‘ban 24, 1438 AH (May 21, 2017)

Grand Sheikh of Al-Azhar,
Professor Aḥmad At-Tayyeb

The Speech of H.E. the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar in Berlin, Germany 2017

In the Name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful

Her Excellency Ms. Christina Aus der Au, President of the German Protestant Church Day (GPCD)
His Excellency Mr. Thomas de Maizière, Interior Minister
Dear Honored Attendees,

May Allah's peace, mercy, and blessings be upon you all!

At the outset, I would like to extend my sincere thanks and appreciation to Dr. Aus der Au and Mr. De Maizière for inviting me to participate in this great celebration. I would like to thank, in particular, the honorable audience who listen to this lecture and discuss with me the questions and quires that may arise. Moreover, I would like to extend my warm greetings to the organizers and participants of the GPCD this year and for those who have established and contributed to it over the past years.

Al-Azhar's participation in the celebration of the GPCD is an encouraging step on the path of interfaith dialogue for peace, acquaintance, and promoting the culture of tolerance. It follows intensive dialogue rounds between Al-Azhar and major Western religious institutions, and meeting prominent international figures, including the Pop of Vatican, the German Chancellor Merkel, and the Interior Minister Mr. De Maizière, who delivered a lecture on tolerance among religions at Al-Azhar University. We have seen good effect that encourages the intellectual activity between the East and the West.

As for my speech today, I would like to admit that it may be too concise to be fully satisfactory; it does not focus on one subject, but tackles various ones, each of which deserves a separate lecture.

The GPCD's celebration sheds light on religion, its necessity and utmost importance in the human life. Religion protects people against deviation, devilish seduction, and following materialistic philosophies that only call for satisfying lusts and selfishness. Moreover, it has been proven that religion is not a matter to be ignored by the scientific civilization or irreligious modernity, or a

matter that went down in history only to be exhibited in museums, as a group of contemporary philosophers claim. The GPCD's celebration provides a new crucial evidence of the invalidity of these allegations. It proves that religion is the natural disposition upon which Allah originated humankind. Thus, it is not to be interpreted as a physical, psychological or social phenomenon, as the theories about its origin claim, denying its real Divine source.

While preparing my speech, I recalled memories of the time when I was a student at the Department of Islamic Philosophy at Al-Azhar University in the sixties of the last century. At that time, I studied the theory of the “law of three stages” in the ninth century, by the well-known philosopher, Auguste Comte. He affirmed that the human mental life has gone through three stages: a theological stage, a metaphysical stage, and a positive stage through which the human mind has reached absolute rationality. Thus, this theory abandons the theology and metaphysics and adopts the new and last methodology of the positivist sciences and empiricism. In criticizing this theory, we learned that it is a distortion of reality and history as we still see believers in religion in the 20th century among the European civilization’s scholars, scientists, physicians, philosophers and intellectual writers.

Today, people are increasingly convinced that religiosity is an innate tendency rooted in the human nature and that this disposition will not go away from the life as long as humankind exists.[14] Another lesson we learn from the thirty-sixth anniversary of the GPCD after five centuries of the establishment of the religious reform movement is that the revival of religious feeling today emerges from the German capital. This country represents a leading model with regard to scientific renaissance and experimental sciences in Europe and the whole world. It is worth to mention that the German creative mind is mostly the planner and developer of highly advanced industry and amazing technological development. It is fair to say that the most important lesson, many of those concerned with studies on modern conflicts

---

[14] Draz, Muḥammad ‘Abdullah. *Al-Deen* (Religion) (2010), Daru l-‘Ilm, p.131, adapted.

between religion and science may not pay attention to, is that this celebration is not only a sign of reconciliation between religion and science. It is also an explicit scientific acknowledgment of religion and its importance in the human life.

I think that humanity feels a dire need for religion, its teachings and morals nowadays. As the current civilization drudges all its intellectual potentials and mental activities for food and bread alone, Jesus warns us against taking this trend as the core philosophy of civilization or as a standard for human relationship between the individuals and communities. Jesus says, “It is written: Man shall not live by bread alone." (Matthew: 4:4) It is an explicit and strong reference to the fact that humanity should not follow the policy of production, consumption, and domination of the vulnerable even for one day, as such life is in reality a miserable and ugly form of death.

We—believers in Allah the Creator— believe that His Wisdom and Mercy include everything and that all religions came for guiding the human beings to know the good and urge them to do it and to warn against evils, be they explicit or implicit, in order to avoid their consequences. We are sure that there is a Divine message to man filled with calls for peace, fraternity, and cooperation in doing good to build this globe, explore its secrets, and exchange its benefits among people. In addition, this message is carried by the Messengers and Prophets who conveyed it to the humans, starting from Prophets Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus the son of Mary, to the Last Prophet Muḩammad (peace be upon them all). All of them call for the same thing, each approving the message of the antecedent and building upon his call and teachings. This explains the similarities of their teachings that seem to be identical. This should not be surprising so long as the source of religions is the same. The messages of such religions must have the same purpose, destination, and direction.

Dear all,

The divine religions are the first and foremost message of peace to humankind. I even think that it is the message of peace to

animals, plants, and the entire universe. We shall know that Islam forbids Muslims from holding weapons in the face of others except in one case, i.e. defending themselves, their lands, and homelands against aggression. It has never occurred before that Muslims fought others to force them to accept Islam. However, Islam deals with non-Muslims, including Christians and Jews, in a brotherly way. The Holy Qurʾān has many explicit verses, whose details are beyond the scope of this address, stating that the relationship between the Muslims and other peaceful people, however their religion or doctrine may be, is that of goodness and fairness. It is enough here to state that Prophet Muḥammad (pbuh) presents Islam as the last Divine message and religion of Allah and admits that the origin of religions in all the messages is the same. Based upon this fact, the Qur'ān mentions the Torah and the Bible in a respectable way and admits their strong effect in guiding people to the straight path. Thus, Allah, in the Holy Qurʾān, describes the Torah and the Bible as "guidance and light." In addition, the Holy Qur'ān describes itself as the Book which authenticates the past scriptures, the Bible (the Torah and Gospel). Islam's relation with all Divine religions is intrinsic. This is clear in the relationship between the Muslims and the Christians. According to Qur'ān, the Christians are the closest of all people to the Muslims and the relationship between the followers of both religions is that of affection, brotherhood, and compassion."[15]

It is my pleasure to say that the origins of our religious reliable sources, past and present, of *Fatwa* and legislation, describe Christians with four qualities in addition to a fifth wonderful one. Such four qualities prove the fact that they are the most enduring people when seditions prevail, the fastest people to heal from disasters and crises, the fastest people to regain determination and firmness, and the best people to deal kindly with the orphans, poor, and vulnerable. The fifth wonderful quality is that they do justice to the oppressed and defend the vulnerable against those who unjustly humiliate them. This fair testimony is part of the

---

[15] From a speech addressed to the House of Lords on June 11, 2015.

Muslim studies and the education presented to our students as found in one of our most authentic books, ranked next to the Holy Qurʾān, which is *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*. This is what Muslims from Morocco to in Indonesia study.

In addition, Muslim scholars do not forget that Christianity had protected and rescued early Muslims from the oppression of paganism and their attempts to eliminate the Muslims and Islam. Christianity was the first protector of Islam. When harm was intensified against vulnerable Muslims who believed in Prophet Muḥammad (pbuh), they could not find refuge from injustices. The Prophet (pbuh) told them, "Travel to Abyssinia as its king would not tolerate injustice." Thus, the early Muslims resorted to this Christian country and its King in two consecutive waves of migrations, including men, women, and children. With the Christian King, the Negus, they found protection, freedom, security, and peace. The Prophet (pbuh) only trusted the Christian Abyssinia to protect his followers who were the backbone of his message at that time because he was sure that both religions were like brothers in harmony with each other against their common enemy represented in paganism, which chased Islam and tried to eliminate it in its early days.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

This is the image of Islam in its openness towards other Divine religions. The history of the Muslims testifies that their civilization kept fraternity with the followers of other religions. It deals with them as per the Sharia rule: "They have rights equal to ours and duties equal to those due upon us." This rule affirms that the non-Muslims have the right to adhere to their religions and faiths and to practice their own religious rites freely. It assures the protection of churches, places of worships, and social and religious customs.

Down to reality, this does not necessarily mean that the way in which some Muslim communities deal with non-Muslims is an angelic one, free of mistakes and faults, or that no tensions or deviations has occurred on the part of Muslim rulers and citizens. However, such tension and deviation, little or much, are an

exception from which no multi-religious, multi-ethnic, or multi-doctrine community is free.

Many historians of the West write about such spirit of tolerance in dealing with non-Muslims in Muslim communities. For example, the Swiss German Professor Adam Metz writes his in-depth work about the Islamic civilization in the 14Th century A.H. As postgraduate students, we studied this work in its Arabic version. It left a deep impression on us about the fairness of the German historians regarding Islam and their objectivity in presenting the history of Islam. According to Professor Metz, Christians living in Muslim communities are citizens who have the same rights of a Muslim citizen, except in occupying some religious positions which required the knowledge of Sharia. You may agree with me that history testifies that no war broke out between Muslims and Christians in the East. This is due to a pure religious cause that the Islamic Sharia commands the Muslim rulers to protect the non-Muslims and assure their security and safety. It would not be acceptable that the Muslim army protects Christian citizens and then launches, or participates in, wars against them.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I do not need to remind you that Islam is entirely free from such terrorist practices committed in its name. Such practices, sorrowfully, defame Islam in the East and the West. They present it as a brutal religion thirsty for blood whose followers are barbarian and savage. Some broadcasting and media agencies, written or televised, record such horrible actions with all its defaults, and broadcast them to instill this bad image in the minds of people, especially the young.

I would like to take the opportunity of participating in such international religious celebration to inform all peoples around the world that such condemnable crimes are far away from Islam and the Muslims. I would like to invite all clergymen and intellectuals worldwide to stand united against terrorism and consider it a joint enemy and have mutual responsibility to face it. I also invite all

clergymen in the West to participate in correcting the wrong image the West has regarding Islam and Muslims.

As you see, Al-Azhar Al-Sharif, the largest religious Muslim institute worldwide, is knocking the doors of the largest religious institutions in the West not to build bridges of fraternity and goodwill, but rather to restore such bridges and consolidate them. It aims to unify religions against such danger and to remind peoples that terrorism is an act of the devils, not of believers in the Lord and His justice, reckoning and punishment.

I wonder how people believe that Islam is the religion of terrorism, even though the vast majority of its victims are Muslim men, women, children, soldiers, and innocent civilians in their homes, roads, means of transportation, etc. It is time for church bells in the West to coincide with mosques' minarets in the East declaring that there is no place for exploiting religions and abusing the poor, destitute, miserable—women or children—who pay their blood, bodies, and families in wars with which they have no hand. They suffer distresses resulting from the shortcoming of those who are able to stop such wars which devastate our Arab world.

Young people,

The future and strength of the present should play their role in spreading the culture of peace, goodwill and communication. They should also deconstruct the culture of hatred, overthrowing civilizations' isolation-walls made for authoritarian purposes and narrow interests. They should also establish the bridges of understanding and common dialogue for achieving the human life worthy of the 21^{st} century.

Personally, I am counting on you, young people, in making a future free of wars suffered by my generation in the past century and the present time. I, for example, was born one year in the aftermath of the end of World War II. Sorrowfully, ten years later, I testified the tripartite aggression against Egypt. I cannot blot out the memories and imagination of such a horrific wartime. After another ten years, the Six-Day War broke out, creating many crises, bottlenecks, and economic problems. The 1973 War

regained confidence, rehabilitation and a sense of victory for the young Arabs. Sorrowfully, soon we all suffered terrorism that did not stop until this moment. In addition, there are the wars raging in our Arab world whose flames have not abated until this moment.

One may wonder, with my generation in their seventies, about their readings on international peace and the human right to life, let alone other rights of security, decent life, justice, and equality. We memorize many human rights and international charters but they remain of no avail in actual reality!

To conclude these painful reflections fraught with pains and hopes, there will be no solution to the crisis of the contemporary world and the tragedies, almost reminiscent of the chaos of the Middle Ages, except through the Divine teachings that you are celebrating today. They assure the world that religion is an absolute necessity, without which achieving fraternity, justice, or equality would be impossible.

Thank you for listening.

As-Salāmu ʿAlaykum wa Raḩmatu Allahi wa Barakatuh

(May the Peace and Blessing of Allah be with you)

Professor Aḩmad At-Tayyeb,
Grand Imam of Al-Azhar

Mashyakhat Al-Azhar
Sha‘ban 1437 AH (May 2017)

Note on Al-Azhar Center for Translation (ACT)

Al-Azhar is the greatest of Muslim institutes of religious knowledge. It undertakes the mission of preserving, promoting and publishing leading materials from the Muslim Heritage. It is also committed to assuming the responsibility of delivering the true message of Islam to the entire humanity around the world. It works on achieving human progress and guaranteeing security, stability and self-comfort for all human beings in this life and in the life to come. Al-Azhar is also concerned with reviving the Arab civilization and the intellectual and scientific heritage in endeavors to highlight the good impacts of Arabs on human development and progress. Furthermore, Al-Azhar works on promoting morals, scientific progress, arts, social services, national and humanitarian initiatives and spiritual values. It provides the Muslim and Arab worlds with qualified religious scholars and experts of Islamic *Shari'a*, religious culture, Arabic Language and Quranic studies.

ACT Mission

In his endeavors to develop Al-Azhar, His Eminence Professor Ahmad At-Tayyeb—Al-Azhar Grand Sheikh and Imam, instructed the foundation of Al-Azhar Center for Translation (ACT). ACT aims to provide accredited translation services for all of Al-Azhar sectors and bodies, including Al-Azhar Sheikhdom, University, *Ruwaqs* (Al-Azhar traditional mosque-based classrooms), and the Islamic Research Academy and institutes. ACT aims at achieving the following aims:

1. Translation of top-rated books, researches and studies marked for their universal relevance and benefit as per approval of the Council of Senior Scholars.
2. Translation of invaluable books and studies on Islam into Arabic.
3. Simultaneous interpreting for seminars and conferences organized by Al-Azhar and any of its affiliated bodies.

4. Preparing studies on recent and modern translations of the Glorious Qur’an to choose the best available translations and draw Muslims’ attention to benefit from and republish them.
5. Translation of *Hadith* Collections into foreign languages and examining available translations in this area to edit and rectify any possible mistakes before republishing them when necessary to bring them to the attention of Muslims for wider benefits.
6. Translation of academic papers and specialized studies addressing the issue of non-Arab Muslim communities and crucial questions.
7. Translation of Friday Sermons prepared by Al-Azhar authorized bodies on issues related to non-Arab Muslim communities.
8. Providing elegant and readable subtitling for film materials on Islam prepared by Al-Azhar entrusted bodies.
9. Organizing courses on written translation.
10. Organizing courses on simultaneous interpreting.
11. Publishing a peer-reviewed journal expressing ACT and its specialties.
12. Organizing courses for improvement of professional, cultural and scientific skills of the ACT personnel.

Currently Available Languages: English, French, German, Spanish, Indonesian, Urdu, Persian, Turkish, Greek, Pashtu and Hebrew. (Chinese, Italian, Swahili and Japanese translation teams are currently in process).

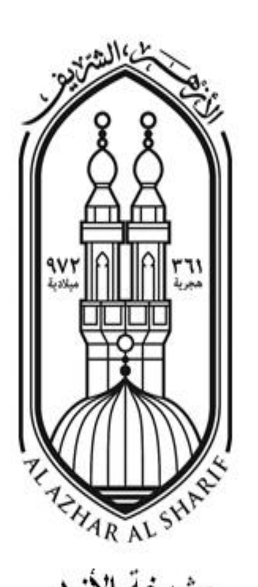
ACT presents *Haqiqat ul-Islam* [The True Islam] Series as the first of its translation contributions. The series introduces a primary collection on the facts and principles of Islam and highlights the central role of man in Islam—being a message for educating lofty values and teaching respect of humankind and of the realms of animals, birds, plants and even inanimate objects as well. It also presents the Islamic principles regulating the process of self-defense in case of attack or aggression when a Muslim must keenly abide by humanitarian principles, build the world and avoid destruction. Masterworks of this series include:

- *Essential Features of Islam* by H. E. Professor Ahmad At-Tayyeb—Al-Azhar Grand Imam.
- *Muslim Perspective of Human Rights* by H.E. Professor Mahmud Hamdy Zaqzouq—former Minister of Religious Endowments.
- *Muslim Conception of War* by H. E. Sheikh Muhammad Abu Zahrah.
- *The Prophet of Islam in Western Thought* by Professor ‘Izzuddin Farraj.

ACT welcomes communicating with the target readers for any comments, suggestions or corrections. Meanwhile, our prayers are due for the translations to be divinely blessed as valuable everlasting contributions to the edifice of human life in the hope to help human welfare and progress and make the world a suitable place for the entire humanity.

Professor Yousuf Amer,

ACT Director



مشيخة الأزهر

مركز الأزهر للترجمة

Al-Azhar Center for Translation (ACT)